



SENATOR THE HON SIMON BIRMINGHAM

Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment
Leader of the Government in the Senate
Senator for South Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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Opening new export doors for Australian farmers and businesses

The Morrison Government will explore possible new free trade agreements with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries and Israel, as part of our ongoing commitment to provide more export opportunities for Australian farmers and businesses, as well as create more jobs.

After receiving \$6.6 million in the recent budget, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will now kick-off feasibility studies to scope the benefits of commencing free trade agreement negotiations with EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and Israel.

A Regional Digital Trade Strategy will also be developed to secure Australia's position as a leader of digital trade as COVID-19 has seen the global trading landscape continue to focus on digital technology.

Federal Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said this push was part of our ongoing commitment to identify and pursue even more market opportunities for Australian exporters, in addition to the trade deals our government had already struck since 2013.

"As a Government we've already opened up new doors for Australian farmers and businesses, doing trade deals with Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia and the Trans-Pacific Partnership which includes Canada, Mexico and Vietnam, as well as recently signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership led by ASEAN," Minister Birmingham said.

"These market access opportunities have seen our exports boom in recent years and led to Australia recording trade surpluses for 34 consecutive months in a row – meaning Australia in the last 34 months has exported more as a country than we have imported.

"Reducing trade barriers and providing more export opportunities for Australian farmers and businesses to reach more customers is absolutely critical as we continue the economic recovery from COVID-19.

"With one in five jobs reliant on trade, and recent trade disruptions with China changing the risk profile for some Australian businesses, it's crucial we continue to look to provide them with even more choices and markets to do business around the world.

"Exploring new export and investment opportunities with EFTA countries has the potential to open up new doors for Australian farmers, businesses and investors, and also builds on our ongoing negotiations to secure ambitious free trade deals with the UK and the EU.

"In addition, we've seen our trade engagement with Israel continue to increase across a range of sectors in recent years, including in advanced manufacturing and the defence industry. There is huge potential for growth in our trade relationship with Israel and this is the first step in formalising and strengthening that trade engagement.

“If ultimately realised, these agreements would secure Australia near universal coverage of trade agreements across the democratic, advanced market economies of the OECD.

“Also, given the world, especially our region, continues to become more digitised and sophisticated we will prioritise the development of a Regional Digital Trade Strategy to make sure Australian businesses are in a strong position to connect with the rising number of businesses and consumers within the region involved in cross-border digital trade.”

In 2019, total merchandise trade with Israel stood at \$1.1 billion in whilst total trade between Australia and EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) reached \$9.4 billion in 2019. Investment from Switzerland alone was valued at more than \$56 billion at the end of 2019 (ranked 12th), while Norway was more than \$25 billion (ranked 18th).

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