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Page: 1/2

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**STATEMENT BY SENATOR THE HON. DON FARRELL  
MINISTER FOR TRADE AND TOURISM**

AUSTRALIA

I would like to start by thanking our Chair for these proceedings, His Excellency Mr Suleimenov, my fellow Vice-Chairs and of course the Director-General, Dr Okonjo-Iweala.

I am pleased to speak to you as Australia's new Minister for Trade and Tourism.

None of us could have predicted the disruptions – to our health, to our economies, to global security, to our trade – that we have seen since the last Ministerial Conference in 2017.

As we all seek to respond to and recover from the impacts of the pandemic, the rules-based order is facing pressure from growing geopolitical instability and strategic competition. This Conference is an opportunity for the WTO to play a part in demonstrating that international rules matter.

The Australian government believes trade has been a great enabler. Trade has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and built and sustained relationships between countries.

But we must not take for granted the benefits of trade, and the global system that enables it.

An effective WTO is essential to the open, rules-based global trading system that underpins Australia's and the world's economic prosperity.

The world is watching, and waiting for us to deliver this week.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Australia and other Members of the WTO have been working together so that trade and trade rules can support Members in their response and recovery. It is imperative that we deliver on those efforts now. I urge all Members to do what it takes to finalise a meaningful multilateral pandemic response at MC12 which includes a TRIPS waiver.

In the midst of the worst food security crisis in decades, agriculture remains the most protected and distorted sector in the world. More transparent and predictable trade flows are crucial to ensuring access to food and essential agricultural products. Australia will work with you all, including in our role as Chair of the Cairns Group, to continue efforts to reform agriculture rules, including on domestic subsidies. It is vital we secure a balanced outcome on agriculture – one that addresses long-term challenges including trade-distorting agricultural subsidies, and food security.

We must conclude the long-overdue negotiations to effectively discipline harmful fisheries subsidies. We are closer to a solution than we have ever been. If we fail to conclude these negotiations, we will undermine not only the environment but also people's livelihoods.

Australia strongly believes we must continue efforts to reform the WTO so that it better serves the interests of all Members. This institution has served us well, but it must evolve to meet the challenges we face in 2022 and those of the future. We should commit to WTO reform, including to restore a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system by the next time we meet at MC13.

Re-vitalising rule-making in the WTO is a crucial part of its reform. Australia is a strong supporter of plurilateral rulemaking where multilateral outcomes are not possible.

The Services Domestic Regulation Joint Statement Initiative is a concrete example of WTO reform in action. Agreeing the first new WTO services rules in 25 years, among participants accounting for 90% of global trade, is a significant win. We want to build on this success by broadening participation to more WTO Members.

We are seeking to replicate this success in other initiatives, including the Investment Facilitation and the E-commerce Joint Statement Initiatives. Success in the e-commerce negotiations will establish the first global digital trade rules among 86 participants, representing over 90% of global trade.

The importance of digital trade during and following the disruptions caused by the pandemic underscores the need to continue the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions. We will work with you to realise that goal.

It's also important to look ahead at MC12 to other important areas of the WTO's work, such as on gender, the environment, and climate change – as they relate to trade.

We want to progress and expand the work of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender. Australia supports identifying ways to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment in trade, and to mainstream gender in Aid-for-Trade activities.

We also support the work of the Informal Working Group on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). MSMEs have been some of the hardest hit firms in the current pandemic particularly in the retail and tourism sectors. Increasing trade opportunities for them will support economic recovery everywhere.

I am pleased to reiterate the Albanese Government's commitment to addressing sustainability and climate change. I look forward to working with you all on these issues in the WTO. Australia will actively support the WTO Joint Initiatives on trade and environment –to explore ways to liberalise environmental goods and services trade and address plastic pollution, environmentally harmful subsidies and trade-related climate challenges.

Make no mistake, this Conference matters.

It matters because global trade underpins the stability and prosperity of our economies, our communities, our businesses, our workers and our environment.

It matters because the rules-based order is being undermined by a range of challenges and the WTO can reinforce that order.

The decisions we make here at MC12 can support us all, and the rules-based system that we all benefit from.

As Trade Minister of Australia, Chair of the Cairns Group, and Vice Chair of this Conference, I assure you Australia is committed to achieving meaningful outcomes this week. I look forward to working with you all to get this important job done.

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