



Cross-Departmental Roundtable on FTA Modernisation and Critical Mineral Supply Chains

Roundtable Concept Note for DFAT Review | Project: Options for FTA Modernisation to Strengthen Critical Mineral Supply Chains for the Indo-Pacific Green Economy Transition (UNSW-DFAT project)
| **November 2025** | INITIAL DRAFT

For DFAT Review: Concept Note Overview

This concept note seeks DFAT approval to proceed with a cross-departmental roundtable on FTA modernisation for critical minerals and broader Southeast Asia trade priorities. The roundtable is a key consultation activity under the UNSW-DFAT project examining FTA modernisation options for Southeast Asia critical mineral supply chains.

What this concept note contains:

1. **Background Paper and Agenda** (below): The document that would be circulated to Commonwealth Departments in November to enable them to identify appropriate Director-level or equivalent representatives for the roundtable. This section is formatted for standalone circulation.
2. **Draft Circulation Email** (Appendix): Proposed email text inviting Departments to the roundtable, and requesting nominations for appropriate representatives.
3. **Process and Next Steps** (Appendix): Timeline for approval, circulation, Departmental responses, and roundtable scheduling.

DFAT approval requested by Friday, 14 November 2025:

- ☐ Approve Background Paper content for circulation to Departments (with any suggested edits)
- ☐ Approve draft circulation email text (with any amendments)
- ☐ Confirm DFAT attendance from relevant branches (see proposed list in Appendix A)
- ☐ Confirm which additional Commonwealth Departments should receive circulation
- ☐ **SELECT PREFERRED ROUNDTABLE TIMING:**
 - ☐ **Option A: Early December 2025** (formative input on project scope and analytical priorities)
 - ☐ **Option B: Early February 2026** (review and refinement of draft recommendations)

Strategic timing considerations:

The choice between early December and early February timing has substantive implications for how the roundtable contributes to project deliverables:

- **Early December 2025 (formative):** Roundtable occurs as the Evidence Review is being updated and before the Consultation Summary and Technical Paper are drafted, enabling Departments to shape analytical priorities, identify which barriers and FTA provisions merit detailed examination, and influence the research agenda. This maximizes Departmental input on project scope. If the roundtable occurs before 6 December, an updated Evidence Review will

be delivered one week prior to provide participants with current analysis; the existing Evidence Review will be circulated with invitations. Venue: UNSW Canberra.

- **Early February 2026 (summative):** Roundtable occurs after the Consultation Summary is delivered and draft Technical Paper is complete, enabling Departments to review and refine specific model provisions and implementation recommendations based on concrete analysis. This provides more substantive material for discussion and ensures recommendations are grounded in Departmental operational realities. The updated Evidence Review will be an input to discussions. Venue: UNSW Canberra.

Both options deliver valuable cross-departmental dialogue; the choice depends on whether DFAT prioritizes shaping research direction (December) or refining specific recommendations (February).

Why this roundtable format:

The six-hour Director-level roundtable enables substantive cross-portfolio dialogue on operational FTA implementation questions while maintaining focus on policy substance. This format has proven effective in prior multi-stakeholder processes for eliciting actionable insights that inform policy development.

The roundtable timing directly affects how it feeds into project deliverables:

If early December 2025 roundtable selected:

- **Consultation Summary** (6 December 2025): Synthesizes roundtable input alongside other consultations, documenting cross-departmental priorities (with cross-departmental priorities added as an Addendum after 6 December if the roundtable is hosted later in December)
- **Technical Paper** (January 2026): Incorporates roundtable findings on which FTA provisions and mechanisms to analyze in detail
- **Final Report** (28 February 2026): Comprehensive FTA modernisation roadmap informed by roundtable priorities

If early February 2026 roundtable selected:

- **Consultation Summary** (6 December 2025): Synthesizes other stakeholder consultations (industry, Southeast Asian partners, Track 2 Dialogue I)
- **Technical Paper** (January 2026 draft): Model provisions developed based on other consultations, circulated to Departments for pre-roundtable review
- **Roundtable** (early February 2026): Departments review and refine draft Technical Paper recommendations
- **Final Report** (28 February 2026): Incorporates roundtable refinements before delivery

BACKGROUND PAPER AND AGENDA

Proposed Material For Circulation to Commonwealth Departments (as separate PDF document, incorporating DFAT preferred changes)

Note: This Background Paper has been designed to accommodate either December 2025 or February 2026 roundtable timing. DFAT will populate the specific date and scenario-appropriate details before circulation to Departments, ensuring the letter Departments receive is clear and unambiguous about the selected timing option.

Purpose and context

This roundtable directly supports implementation of Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040 by identifying actionable FTA modernisation opportunities across critical minerals, agriculture, and green economy priority sectors. The session creates an informal opportunity for

Departments to discuss how FTA modernisation might advance portfolio-specific priorities—for example: DISR's critical minerals supply chain resilience and standards harmonisation, DCCEE's operationalising climate commitments and green economy transition, DAFF's agricultural market access expansion, or Standards Australia's mutual recognition advancement—while strengthening policy coherence across trade and sectoral domains.

Roundtable timing and format:

Date: [DATE TBC - DFAT to populate before circulation]

Time: 9:00-15:00 (six hours including breaks)

Venue: UNSW Canberra (specific room and address to be advised)

Format: Three substantive discussion sessions focusing on operational FTA implementation questions: which specific barriers matter most for your portfolio, which FTA provisions work in practice, and where cross-portfolio coordination can strengthen outcomes. The roundtable enables substantive cross-Departmental dialogue on practical modernisation opportunities while maintaining focus on policy substance. DFAT will coordinate with participating Departments on specific date selection based on Departmental availability.

Cross-Departmental opportunity: FTA modernisation offers practical mechanisms for advancing diverse portfolio objectives simultaneously. Trade sustainability provisions can operationalise Paris Agreement commitments through binding disciplines; mutual recognition agreements can advance DISR's standards harmonisation and critical minerals supply chain resilience; SPS cooperation and digital certification can improve DAFF's agricultural market access and reduce compliance costs; regulatory cooperation frameworks can advance Standards Australia's MRA objectives while reducing compliance fragmentation for Australian exporters. This informal dialogue identifies where trade provisions serve multiple policy goals simultaneously, and where practical coordination through existing channels can strengthen cross-portfolio outcomes.

The project uses critical minerals as a "pathfinder sector" - conducting detailed analysis of trade and regulatory barriers in this high-complexity domain, then testing whether identified patterns and solutions apply to agriculture, green economy, and other sectors. This focuses analytical resources efficiently while generating transferable insights for broader FTA modernisation.

This roundtable focuses on operational questions: which specific barriers matter most, which FTA provisions actually work in practice, and where cross-portfolio coordination can add value. High-level strategy and political objectives are well established through the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy and Critical Minerals Strategy.

Approach

The roundtable will test whether barriers and solutions identified through detailed critical minerals analysis apply to other sectors. Participants from agriculture, climate, and energy portfolios will assess whether proposed FTA provisions address barriers they observe in Southeast Asian markets within their respective domains.

Facilitation and expertise

This roundtable will be jointly facilitated by UNSW Centre for Sustainable Development Reform (CSDR) and DFAT, drawing on CSDR's specialist expertise in multi-stakeholder dialogue and technical subject matter.

Lead facilitator: Dr. Ben Milligan [<https://www.linkedin.com/in/bmmilligan/>] is the Founding Director of UNSW Centre for Sustainable Development Reform. His expertise in resource governance, sustainability standards, and trade policy includes advising several Indo-Pacific governments, the

ACP Group of States, and the European Commission. Dr. Milligan has specialist expertise in public sector facilitation in sensitive settings, from operational to Ministerial level.

Technical expertise: Additional UNSW Energy Institute and CSDR specialists are available (subject to final selection and confirmation) to address technical questions on processing technologies, renewable energy integration, and supply chain economics during the roundtable, including experts in electricity markets, clean energy techno-economics, solar manufacturing, and Asia-Pacific energy resilience.

Discussion structure

Given time constraints (six hours with 10-20 participants), the roundtable focuses on three substantive sessions with sufficient time for meaningful discussion:

Session 1: Mapping priority barriers (90 minutes)

Objective: Identify which specific barriers most constrain trade and investment across represented sectors, and how addressing these barriers through FTA provisions could advance Departmental portfolio priorities.

Discussion questions:

- What are your Department's top strategic priorities in Southeast Asia over the next 3-5 years? Examples: DISR—critical minerals supply chain resilience and standards harmonisation; DCCEE—operationalising climate commitments and green economy transition; DAFF—agricultural market access expansion and SPS efficiency; Standards Australia—MRA advancement and compliance fragmentation reduction.
- What are the top 3-5 barriers businesses in your sector report encountering in Southeast Asian markets? (Regulatory approvals? Standards compliance? Customs procedures? Investment screening? Other?)
- Based on stakeholder feedback your Department receives, what are the policy consequences of these barriers for your portfolio objectives? Which barriers create the most significant policy costs in terms of foregone strategic outcomes (e.g., supply chain resilience, climate commitments, market access targets)?
- Where do you see similar patterns across sectors vs. sector-specific issues?
- Of the barriers discussed, which ones—if addressed through FTA provisions—would most directly advance YOUR Department's portfolio priorities? Where do you see opportunities for FTA modernisation to serve objectives beyond trade per se (such as climate commitments, industry development, or regulatory efficiency)?

Expected output: Consolidated list of priority barriers, grouped by type (standards, regulatory procedures, trade facilitation, investment, other) with sectoral and cross-sectoral perspectives.

Session 2: Assessing policy instruments and FTA provisions (120 minutes)

Objective: Identify which FTA provisions should be prioritized in Southeast Asia FTA negotiations based on Departmental portfolio priorities, and what inter-departmental coordination would strengthen outcomes.

Focus and approach: This session focuses on policy design choices and negotiating strategy for FTA modernisation. Questions ask participants to assess policy trade-offs between competing approaches (e.g., mutual recognition vs. harmonisation, comprehensive vs. differentiated agreements), identify which provisions would advance Departmental portfolio objectives, and recommend negotiating priorities and sequencing strategies. Questions about operational effectiveness of existing provisions—which mechanisms deliver best results in practice, what drives

business utilisation patterns—will be addressed through industry consultations and inform the Evidence Review and Technical Paper that participants will review.

Critical minerals case study discussion (45 minutes):

- **US-Australia Critical Minerals Framework as negotiating precedent:** Which elements of this bilateral framework should inform Australia's Southeast Asia FTA negotiating priorities? What policy design choices (price support mechanisms vs. stockpile coordination vs. regulatory cooperation) best align with DISR's supply chain resilience objectives? Where do FTA provisions offer additional policy levers beyond bilateral frameworks, and where are bilateral instruments more appropriate?
- **Standards and sustainability certifications:** Fragmentation across schemes creates both market access barriers (DAFF's concern) and supply chain traceability challenges (DISR's concern). What are the policy trade-offs between mutual recognition approaches (faster implementation, less alignment), harmonisation approaches (deeper integration, longer timeframes), and procedural transparency requirements (pragmatic middle ground)? Which approach best serves YOUR Department's strategic priorities, and what negotiating priorities would that imply for Southeast Asia FTA modernisation?
- **Investment protections:** Australia's existing FTAs include diverse investment protection architectures—ISDS provisions in some bilaterals, state-to-state dispute settlement in RCEP, investor-state ombudsman in AANZFTA upgrade. Given DISR's interest in facilitating Australian critical minerals processing investment in Southeast Asia, and Treasury's investment policy settings, what policy approach should Southeast Asia FTA modernisation prioritize? Should Australia negotiate for stronger investment protections, leverage existing provisions more effectively, or focus on non-FTA investment facilitation mechanisms? What inter-departmental coordination between DISR, Treasury, DFAT, and EFA would strengthen Australia's approach?
- **Processing and value addition:** Australia faces a policy tension between encouraging domestic critical minerals processing (DISR's industry development objective) and securing access to Southeast Asian processing capacity for Australian minerals (supply chain resilience objective). This tension is mirrored in Southeast Asian partners' own export restriction policies. What negotiating approach best manages this tension—seeking export restriction disciplines in FTA provisions (which constrains both parties), establishing regulatory cooperation mechanisms for transparency and consultation, or accepting current policy space? What does YOUR Department's portfolio priority imply for Australia's negotiating position?

Cross-sectoral lessons (45 minutes):

- **Trade facilitation provisions:** The recent AANZFTA upgrade (entered into force April 2025) includes enhanced trade facilitation provisions—self-certification, full cumulation, advance rulings, and digital customs procedures. RCEP offers an alternative architecture. As these provisions begin implementation, what evidence requirements should guide Australia's assessment of which mechanisms to prioritize in future Southeast Asia FTA negotiations? What coordination mechanisms between DFAT (trade negotiations), DAFF (sectoral utilisation), and Department of Home Affairs (customs implementation) would enable systematic evidence collection on what drives FTA utilisation or non-utilisation?
- **Regulatory cooperation mechanisms:** FTAs offer diverse regulatory cooperation architectures—from binding advance ruling requirements (CPTPP model) to softer stakeholder consultation frameworks (RCEP model) to standing working groups (various bilaterals). Different mechanisms impose different implementation resource requirements on both Australian agencies and Southeast Asian partner regulators. What policy criteria should guide Australia's prioritization of regulatory cooperation mechanisms in FTA negotiations—depth of disciplines, administrative feasibility, partner capacity, or sectoral flexibility? What coordination between DFAT (FTA negotiations), Standards Australia (technical standards), DAFF (SPS cooperation), and DISR (industry regulation) would ensure regulatory cooperation provisions align with Departmental operational capacity and partner country realities?
- **Sustainability chapters and green economy agreements:** The Australia-Singapore Green Economy Agreement represents Australia's most ambitious sustainability provisions in an FTA context. As DCCEEW seeks to operationalise Australia's climate commitments through trade

policy, what policy considerations should guide decisions about which elements to pursue in broader Southeast Asia FTA modernisation? Should Australia negotiate for comparable depth with all Southeast Asian partners (comprehensive approach), or tailor ambition to partner capacity and political will (differentiated approach)? What trade-offs exist between negotiating ambitious sustainability provisions and achieving timely FTA implementation? How can DFAT and DCCEEW coordination ensure sustainability chapters serve both climate policy objectives and trade policy timelines?

- **Digital provisions and enabling infrastructure:** Digital tools offer potential for trade facilitation (e-certification, digital customs), supply chain traceability (critical minerals provenance), and regulatory compliance (digital product conformity). However, implementation depends on both Australian and Southeast Asian digital infrastructure capacity and regulatory readiness. What policy approach should guide Australia's digital provisions in Southeast Asia FTA modernisation—negotiating for comprehensive digital trade architecture (ambitious but implementation-dependent), focusing on specific high-value applications (pragmatic and targeted), or emphasizing capacity building and regulatory cooperation to enable future digital trade? What coordination between DFAT (digital trade negotiations), DISR (industry digitalisation), and Department of Home Affairs (digital customs) would ensure digital FTA provisions align with implementation capacity on both sides?

Synthesis and prioritisation (30 minutes):

- Based on the policy trade-offs and negotiating strategy options discussed, which provisions should be prioritized for Southeast Asia FTA modernisation, and what sequencing strategy makes sense given partner country capacity, political feasibility, and Departmental implementation readiness?
- For each promising provision or policy instrument discussed, which Department's portfolio priorities would it most directly advance? How could specific provisions serve multiple Departmental objectives simultaneously?
- For priority provisions identified, where can Australia draw on proven precedents from existing agreements (lower negotiating risk, established templates), and where is policy innovation required (higher negotiating complexity, longer timeframes)? How should this risk assessment inform negotiating sequencing and resource allocation?
- What sequencing strategy balances quick wins (building negotiating momentum, demonstrating value to stakeholders) against longer-term negotiations (deeper integration, more complex provisions)? Should Australia pursue parallel tracks (bilateral quick wins alongside regional deeper integration), or sequential approach prioritizing one partnership for comprehensive upgrade?
- What cross-portfolio coordination would enhance the effectiveness of priority provisions?

Expected output: Menu of promising policy instruments and FTA provisions with assessment of applicability, proven track record, and implementation requirements.

Session 3: Coordination and implementation (60 minutes)

Objective: Identify practical coordination opportunities that can advance multiple portfolio priorities through FTA mechanisms, while discovering where informal collaboration could strengthen policy coherence across trade, climate, industry, and standards domains.

Discussion questions:

- Where do YOUR Department's strategic priorities intersect with trade policy in ways that could benefit from FTA provisions or coordination mechanisms? Specific examples: How could MRAs or investment facilitation advance DISR's critical minerals supply chain resilience? How could sustainability chapters help DCCEEW operationalise Australia's climate commitments? How could SPS cooperation advance DAFF's agricultural market access priorities? How could regulatory cooperation reduce compliance fragmentation for Standards Australia?
- Where do you see opportunities for practical informal coordination between DFAT trade policy and your portfolio priorities that could strengthen outcomes for both Departments? Examples:

joint development of sustainability standards, coordinated infrastructure investment approaches, shared regulatory capacity building with Southeast Asian partners.

- What coordination mechanisms work well in practice? What doesn't work? The US-Australia Critical Minerals Framework demonstrates effective coordination across DFAT, DISR, EFA, Defence—what made it work, and how could similar approaches be institutionalised for FTA processes?
- How could the project's Technical Paper (January) and Final Report (February) most effectively support YOUR Department's strategic objectives? What specific analysis, recommendations, or evidence would help you advance portfolio priorities through trade policy channels?

Expected output: Practical recommendations for inter-departmental coordination and clear research priorities for project completion.

What this roundtable will not address

To maintain focus, several important topics are explicitly out of scope:

- High-level strategy and political objectives (these are established through existing government strategies)
- Specific negotiating positions or confidential negotiation details
- Comprehensive review of all existing FTAs (focus is on Southeast Asia modernisation priorities)
- Detailed legal analysis of FTA text (project will cover this in subsequent deliverables)
- Resource allocation or Departmental responsibilities (coordination mechanisms only)

Preparation

To make best use of discussion time, participants are encouraged to:

1. Identify 3-5 specific barriers businesses report in Southeast Asian markets within your portfolio
2. Consider which FTA provisions or regulatory cooperation mechanisms have worked well or poorly in practice based on Departmental experience
3. Review the AANZFTA upgrade (entered into force April 2025), particularly chapters relevant to your portfolio
4. Bring examples of successful inter-departmental coordination on trade policy (or coordination challenges) that might inform better approaches

No formal presentations are required. The session will be interactive with structured discussion around key questions.

Outputs and next steps

This roundtable format represents a deliberate approach to cross-portfolio operational coordination, designed specifically to elicit Director-level expertise on practical FTA implementation while maintaining focus on policy substance rather than high-level strategy. The Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership provides a precedent for this facilitation model delivering actionable outcomes through structured multi-stakeholder dialogue.

How roundtable findings will inform project deliverables:

The roundtable will provide cross-Departmental input on priority barriers, promising FTA provisions, and coordination opportunities. These findings will inform the project's subsequent deliverables:

- **Consultation Summary (December 2025):** Synthesizes stakeholder input including this roundtable, documenting cross-departmental priorities and how FTA provisions could advance multiple portfolio objectives simultaneously
- **Technical Paper (January 2026):** Detailed analysis of model provisions and flexible options for critical minerals, agriculture, and green economy sectors. Structured to enable each Department to identify opportunities relevant to portfolio priorities. Circulated to participating Departments for review (not for public release)
- **Final Report (28 February 2026):** Comprehensive FTA modernisation recommendations and implementation roadmap to 2040, incorporating cross-departmental coordination mechanisms

Departmental review process: Participating Departments will receive draft sections of key deliverables for review and comment before finalisation. This ensures Departmental perspectives are accurately reflected, allows portfolio-specific priorities to shape recommendations, and enables Departments to identify how deliverables can most effectively support their strategic objectives. DFAT will coordinate this review process with participating Departments.

Appendix A: Invited Roundtable Participants

Note to Departments: The participant list below reflects proposed Director-level positions based on portfolio relevance to FTA modernisation and critical minerals supply chains. Departments are invited to confirm appropriate representatives or nominate alternative positions if more suitable to your organisational structure and strategic priorities.

Target participation: 10-18 Director-level officials to enable substantive discussion within six-hour timeframe.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Office of Global Trade Negotiations

- Director, Agriculture and Non-Tariff Barriers Branch
- Director, Services, Competition and Intellectual Property Branch
- Director, Goods and Industrial Policy Branch

FTA Implementation and Inclusive Trade Branch

- Director, Bilateral FTA Strategy and Implementation Section
- Program Manager (Martin Hiscutt - project liaison)

Office of Southeast Asia

- Director-level position, Southeast Asia Strategy and Development

Digital Trade, Services and Mobility Branch

- Director-level position (for digital economy discussion)

DFAT representation should cover trade negotiations, FTA implementation, Southeast Asia regional engagement, and relevant sectoral expertise.

Department of Industry, Science and Resources

Critical Minerals Office

- Head or Deputy Head, Critical Minerals Office
- Director, Critical Minerals Security

Standards and Conformance Infrastructure

- Director-level position managing standards policy and mutual recognition agreements

Trade and Industry Policy

- Director-level position on FTA development from industry perspective

DISR provides critical minerals policy expertise, standards coordination, and industry perspective on trade barriers.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Climate Change Group

- Director, International Climate and Energy Division
- Director, Climate Change Policy Branch

Renewable Energy and Net Zero Implementation

- Director-level position from Energy Group or Emissions Reduction Division

DCCEEW input ensures FTA sustainability chapters align with Australia's climate commitments and that green economy agreements serve both trade and environmental objectives.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Trade, Market Access & International Division

- Director, Agricultural Trade & Market Access Branch
- Director, International Organisations & Negotiations Branch

Export Standards

- Director or senior representative, Export Standards Branch

DAFF brings experience on SPS measures, technical standards, and agricultural market access directly relevant to FTA modernisation.

Standards Australia

- Senior representative from strategic standards development or international engagement team

Standards Australia provides technical expertise on standards development, mutual recognition, and conformity assessment procedures.

Additional Participants (as available and relevant)

Department of the Treasury

- Director, International Finance and Development (investment policy perspective)

Export Finance Australia

- Director-level position managing critical minerals or Southeast Asia project financing

Australian Trade and Investment Commission

- Director, Investment Facilitation or Southeast Asia Business Development

These participants provide complementary perspectives on investment policy, project financing, and on-the-ground business barriers.

Participant Selection

Core participants (8-12):

- DFAT: 3-4 representatives (negotiations, implementation, Southeast Asia, digital/services)
- DISR: 2 representatives (Critical Minerals Office, standards/industry policy)
- DCCEE: 2 representatives (climate/international, energy/net zero)
- DAFF: 2 representatives (trade/market access, standards)
- Standards Australia: 1 representative

Additional participants (2-6):

- Treasury: 1 (investment policy)
- EFA: 1 (project financing)
- Austrade: 1 (investment facilitation)
- Others as relevant

Total: 10-18 participants to allow meaningful discussion within time constraints.

Contact for participant coordination: Martin Hiscutt, Program Manager Bilateral FTA Strategy and Implementation Section, DFAT FTAmernisation@dfat.gov.au +61 2 6178 6139

Appendix B: Background Reading

Evidence Review: FTA Modernisation for Critical Minerals and Southeast Asia Trade UNSW Centre for Sustainable Development Reform Living Document - First Published October 2025

For Departments seeking detailed context on critical minerals trade barriers, current FTA architecture, regional processing opportunities, and sustainability dimensions, the project's Evidence Review provides comprehensive analysis with full citations.

Key sections relevant to roundtable preparation:

- **Section 2:** Current FTA Architecture - What provisions in AANZFTA, RCEP, CPTPP, IA-CEPA, MAFTA, and TAFTA address minerals trade, processing, and investment
- **Section 3:** Documented Trade Barriers - Five categories (tariff escalation, export restrictions, local content, standards divergence, administrative barriers)
- **Section 4:** Regional Processing Landscape - Capabilities and gaps across Southeast Asia
- **Section 5:** Sustainability Dimensions - ESG standards and certification mechanisms
- **Section 6:** Instrumental Options - Available policy mechanisms (FTA upgrades, MRAs, cooperation frameworks)

The Evidence Review will be attached to the circulation email. Departments may find it useful for identifying portfolio-specific priorities and barriers relevant to roundtable discussions, though detailed pre-reading is not required for participation.

Questions about the Evidence Review: Dr. Ben Milligan, UNSW Project Lead
b.milligan@unsw.edu.au

APPENDIX: CIRCULATION EMAIL

Subject: Cross-Departmental Roundtable on FTA Modernisation - Request for Director-Level Representatives (December 2025 or February 2026)

To: [DFAT to populate distribution list based on approved Departments]

From: [DFAT - Bilateral FTA Strategy and Implementation Section]

CC: Martin Hiscutt (FTAmmodernisation@dfat.gov.au); Dr. Ben Milligan (b.milligan@unsw.edu.au)

Dear Colleagues,

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in partnership with UNSW Centre for Sustainable Development Reform, is convening a cross-departmental roundtable to identify practical FTA modernisation opportunities that can advance portfolio-specific priorities across critical minerals, agriculture, green economy, and other sectors.

We request your Department to nominate 1-2 Director-level representatives for this six-hour roundtable session.

Why this roundtable matters for your portfolio:

FTA modernisation offers practical mechanisms for advancing diverse portfolio objectives simultaneously:

- **Climate and environment:** Sustainability provisions can operationalise Paris Agreement commitments through binding disciplines
- **Industry and critical minerals:** Mutual recognition agreements can advance standards harmonisation and supply chain resilience
- **Agriculture:** SPS cooperation and digital certification can improve market access and reduce compliance costs
- **Standards:** Regulatory cooperation frameworks can advance MRA objectives while reducing compliance fragmentation

The roundtable creates an informal opportunity for Departments to discover how FTA provisions can serve portfolio-specific priorities while strengthening policy coherence across trade and sectoral domains.

Timing and commitment:

DFAT is considering two timing options, each offering distinct strategic value:

Option A: Early December 2025 (formative input on research priorities and analytical scope)

Option B: Early February 2026 (review and refinement of draft model provisions)

Time: 9:00-15:00 (6 hours including breaks) **Location:** UNSW Canberra (specific room and address TBC once dates finalized) **Format:** Three substantive sessions with structured discussion (no formal presentations required)

Key difference between options:

- **December:** Departments shape what the project examines - which barriers to prioritize, which FTA provisions to analyze, what research questions matter most. Maximum influence on project scope.
- **February:** Departments review and refine specific draft recommendations - concrete model provisions, implementation mechanisms, coordination frameworks. Ensures recommendations are practical and actionable.

Background Paper (attached) provides detailed explanation of both scenarios, including how each timing option affects deliverable integration.

Roundtable focus:

1. **Session 1:** Mapping priority barriers where FTA provisions could advance Departmental objectives
2. **Session 2:** Assessing policy instruments and FTA provisions drawing on recent innovations
3. **Session 3:** Identifying practical coordination opportunities and research priorities

Background Paper attached provides full discussion structure, preparation guidance, and proposed participant positions. Departments may nominate alternative positions if more suitable to your organisational structure.

Optional background reading: Evidence Review (Living Document - First Published October 2025) is also attached for Departments seeking detailed context on critical minerals trade barriers and FTA architecture, though pre-reading is not required for participation.

How this roundtable fits into broader work:

The roundtable directly informs subsequent project deliverables designed as practical resources for participating Departments:

- **Consultation Summary** (6 December 2025): Cross-Departmental priorities and opportunities
- **Technical Paper** (January 2026): Model provisions with flexible options - circulated for Departmental review
- **Final Report** (February 2026): Comprehensive FTA modernisation recommendations to 2040

Participating Departments will have opportunity to review and comment on draft deliverables before finalisation.

Please respond by [DATE - suggest 2-3 weeks from circulation] with:

1. **Names and position titles** of 1-2 Director-level representatives your Department will nominate
2. **Timing preference:** Does your Department prefer early December (formative) or early February (summative) timing? Please indicate any specific scheduling constraints.
3. **Alternative positions** if proposed participants list (Background Paper Appendix A) doesn't align with your current structure
4. **Specific portfolio priorities or barriers** you'd like the roundtable to address

Note on timing: DFAT will select final roundtable date based on Departmental preferences and scheduling constraints. We will confirm specific date (within selected month) once Departmental responses are received.

Questions?

DFAT Program Manager: Martin Hiscutt Bilateral FTA Strategy and Implementation Section
FTAmernisation@dfat.gov.au +61 2 6178 6139

UNSW Project Lead: Dr. Ben Milligan Director, UNSW Centre for Sustainable Development Reform
b.milligan@unsw.edu.au

We look forward to your Department's participation in this cross-portfolio dialogue.

Best regards,

[signatory]

Attachments:

1. Background Paper and Agenda - Cross-Departmental Roundtable on FTA Modernisation (PDF)
2. Evidence Review - FTA Modernisation for Critical Minerals and Southeast Asia Trade (PDF)

APPENDIX: Process and Next Steps

Implementation Timeline and Scheduling Constraints:

Current situation: Concept note submitted 10 November 2025. This compressed timeline accounts for the upcoming holiday period and DFAT's requested one-week review window.

Key scheduling constraints:

- **Holiday period:** 20 December 2025 - 10 January 2026 (Departments and UNSW unavailable)
- **Excluded week:** 15-19 December 2025 (venue unavailable)
- **Consultation Summary delivery:** 6 December 2025 (Grant Agreement milestone)

Viable roundtable timing options:

Given these constraints, two feasible timing windows exist:

Option A: Week of 9-13 December 2025 (*tight but achievable*)

- Enables formative input on research priorities before Consultation Summary finalized
- Requires compressed 2-week turnaround for Departmental responses (instead of usual 3 weeks)
- Roundtable findings can inform Consultation Summary (6 Dec delivery)
- Very limited buffer for scheduling conflicts

Option B: Week of 10-14 February 2026 (*more realistic*)

- Allows adequate time for Departmental coordination and scheduling
- Enables review and refinement of draft Technical Paper (completed in January)
- Avoids compressed timeline pressure
- Better accommodates Departmental availability constraints

Implementation timeline:

Week	Dates	Activity	Responsible
Week 1	10-17 Nov	DFAT review of concept note; select timing option; approve Background Paper and circulation email with any edits	DFAT (Martin Hiscutt)
Week 2	18-24 Nov	DFAT circulation to approved Departments (Background Paper + Evidence Review attached)	DFAT
Weeks 3-4	25 Nov - 6 Dec	Departments nominate Director-level representatives (2-week compressed response window)	Departments
Week 5	9-13 Dec	IF DECEMBER OPTION: Roundtable session (specific date based on Departmental availability)	UNSW + DFAT
Week 5	9-13 Dec	IF FEBRUARY OPTION: DFAT finalizes February date based on Departmental responses	DFAT
Holiday period	20 Dec - 10 Jan	<i>No activity - Departments and UNSW unavailable</i>	—
January 2026	Throughout	IF FEBRUARY OPTION: Technical Paper development; draft circulated to Departments for pre-roundtable review (mid-Jan)	UNSW → DFAT distribution

Week	Dates	Activity	Responsible
January 2026	Late Jan	IF FEBRUARY OPTION: Logistics coordination (venue, catering, calendar invitations)	UNSW + DFAT
Week of 10-14 Feb	TBC	IF FEBRUARY OPTION: Roundtable session (specific date TBC)	UNSW + DFAT

Logistics requirements (either timing option):

- UNSW Canberra venue booking (specific room and address to be confirmed)
- Catering for 10-18 participants (6-hour session with breaks)
- Circulation of Evidence Review and any pre-reading materials
- Calendar invitations with venue details
- Name cards, room setup, technical equipment (projector, microphone if needed)

Integration with project deliverables:

December roundtable scenario:

- **Consultation Summary (6 December 2025):** Incorporates roundtable findings on cross-Departmental priorities
- **Technical Paper (January 2026):** Shaped by roundtable input on which FTA provisions to analyze in detail
- **Final Report (28 February 2026):** Incorporates coordination mechanisms identified through roundtable

February roundtable scenario:

- **Consultation Summary (6 December 2025):** Synthesizes other consultations (industry, Southeast Asian partners, Track 2 Dialogue I)
- **Technical Paper (January 2026 draft):** Circulated to Departments for pre-roundtable review
- **Roundtable (early February 2026):** Departments review and refine draft Technical Paper
- **Final Report (28 February 2026):** Incorporates roundtable refinements before delivery

Departmental review process (both scenarios):

Participating Departments will receive draft sections of key deliverables for review and comment before finalisation. DFAT will coordinate this review process, ensuring:

- Departmental perspectives are accurately reflected
- Portfolio-specific priorities shape recommendations appropriately
- Departments can identify how deliverables support their strategic objectives
- Confidential or sensitive information is appropriately handled

Questions about process or timeline:

Martin Hiscutt Program Manager, Bilateral FTA Strategy and Implementation Section
FTAmmodernisation@dfat.gov.au +61 2 6178 6139