

Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement

Export Council of Australia Submission

The Export Council of Australia (ECA) welcomes the development of the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement. The Agreement has the potential to expedite private sector efforts in support of the environment and international trade.

We offer this brief submission to help ensure the benefits of the Agreement are realised. It is informed by ECA's consultations with its members and partners, including a virtual roundtable discussion held on Monday 24 January 2022. This event involved smaller exporters, and services providers to exporters. Representatives from the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement Taskforce were also present.

The private sector participants were from a range of industries, including renewable energy, shipping, mining services, trade finance, food and fashion. They are listed below:

1. Mr Vlad Jotic – Director of Project Development, ANL
2. Mr John Vagenas – Founder and Managing Director, Metallurgical Systems
3. Mr Richard Romanowski – Co-Founder and Executive Director, eleXsys Energy
4. Mr Vinod Tiwari – Global Head of Business Development and Partnerships, Powerledger
5. Mr Andrew Weller – Business Development Manager, Glaciem Cooling Technologies
6. Mr Eduardo Yudowski – Commercial Manager, Aeris
7. Ms Shawnee Fox – CEO, Southern Kuya
8. Ms Julia Callaghan – Director of Regional Development, Regional Development Australia Moreton Bay
9. Mr Tom Tindall – Managing Director, Orientique Fashions
10. Ms Cissy Ma – Managing Director, Grow and Sell Your Biz
11. Mr Mark Seymour – Co-Founder and CEO, MyNewStart.Ai
12. Mr James Thornberry – Managing Director, NCI

In the discussion, the following key challenges and suggestions were raised:

- Minimising Greenwashing – A trusted governance mechanism in the marketplace will be necessary. Unless there is transparent and verifiable reporting of business efforts, including appropriate government oversight, meaningful change is unlikely to be achieved and market confidence could be undermined.

- Connecting with in-country partners – Finding the right people to partner with in export markets is difficult. In the absence of a global name or brand, small exporters will require introductions. Locally-based partners must be trustworthy to provide effective market-intel and guidance of local business practices and regulations.
- Accessing finance – Small exporters are struggling with increasing costs of international trade. So even when they are keen to implement ‘green practices’, financial constraints mean they are unable to take further action. The Government and private financiers should work together to develop financial products that encourage change in behaviour.
- Aligning standards, including accounting – Meeting extensive requirements for certification and licensing in separate jurisdictions can be time consuming and expensive, especially for small exporters. This can be addressed by simplifying and harmonising standards, and through mutual recognition agreements.
- Highlighting the circular economy – Environmental efforts by industry must involve a model production and consumption that reduces waste. Australia has strong capabilities in this area, including in food and aquaculture, and fashion.
- Fast-tracking joint projects – It would be prudent to support a number of projects that would highlight the potential benefits of the Agreement. Projects can be facilitated through joint industry and government funding, cross-border business matching, and clear regulatory hurdles.

In addition and in support of the above points, ECA recommends that the Government:

- provide a funding facility to assist SME exporters incorporate environmental sustainability in their operations and supply chains.
- establish a platform or forum to connect Australian exporters with their Singaporean counterparts, as well as with investors, so experiences could be shared and potential partnerships could be explored.
- align standards and certifications between Australia and Singapore, and for updating those standards so as to encourage environment-friendly practices.
- develop new regulations that would enable relevant market mechanisms that encourage and/or allow use of new technologies.
- assist developing countries (potential future parties to the Agreement) to build their capacity to trade environmental goods and services, or adopt technologies or practices that are friendlier to the environment.
- identify and promote export and trade opportunities with Singapore to encourage Australian businesses to adopt green best practises.

Export Council of Australia

31 January 2022