Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Australian Institute of Landscape Architects
Submission to DFAT on
Call for submissions to the Southeast Asia Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) modernisation review
New Emerging Trade Issues

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities, and greater environmental stewardship. We provide our members with training, recognition, and a community of practice to share knowledge, ideas, and action. With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design and planning of the natural and built environment.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,300+ landscape architects and promotes excellence in planning, design and management for life outdoors. Committed to designing and creating better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation's liveability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects contribute towards better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians.

AILA leads a dynamic and respected profession, creating great places to support healthy communities and a sustainable planet. We work together to create healthy communities, connected urban green infrastructure, and liveable, sustainable cities and regions. Our members are driven by AILA's Strategic Plan core values of which Climate Positive Design is a key driver. We are also committed to creating ***'A greener, healthier, inclusive and climate resilient Australia'*** which is further embedded in our approach.

Depletion of Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services

Climate change represents the most significant systemic risk facing economies and communities, and is a clear manifestation of the long-term degradation of the natural environment.

Economic systems have relied fundamentally on economic growth that disregards its impact on natural resources.

Economists have however widened their focus over time by broadening the meaning of "capital" from physical capital to human capital, to social capital, and finally to recognising the importance of "natural capital": the world's stocks of natural assets, such as geology, soil, air, water, and all living

things. These natural assets deliver to us "ecosystem services", the term used to describe the 'free' goods and services of organisms and processes such as pollinating birds and insects, sources of fresh water, forests, marine life, arable soils and various absorbers of wastes.

The industrial rate of use of ecosystem services that are critical to production has contributed to the degradation of natural capital, now exceeding nature's capacity to regenerate for at least several centuries. New technologies and more capital-intensive modes of production have only accelerated nature's rate of depletion. "A degraded biosphere (of land and air) affords less protection from fire, droughts, floods and storms, all of which are growing in incidence and severity because of human-induced atmospheric change." [1]

The depletion of natural capital also reduces "environmental amenity" - our enjoyment of being out in nature. There is strong evidence that green cities offer positive health effects for babies, children and adults. Currently, half the world's population lives in cities - creating cities with healthy green spaces improves citizens' health and reduces health care costs. The depletion of natural capital also imposes disproportionate cultural, social and economic impacts on Indigenous peoples, particularly where land, water and ecosystem degradation undermines cultural practice and custodianship.

The Green Economy

The New Energy Trade

International trade will need to play a crucial role in helping the world to reach net zero emissions at minimum cost to the economy. A recent report titled "The New Energy Trade" [2] provides a world-first analysis of likely international trade in clean energy, which will mainly involve energy being embedded in "green" products.

In examining the likely energy needs of the five large economies (China, Japan, South Korea, India and Germany) which together account for more than half of global greenhouse emissions, the report projects large shortfalls in their local supply of electricity.

It concluded that Australia could potentially contribute up to 10 percent of the world's emissions reductions while generating six to eight times larger revenues than those typical from our fossil fuel exports, by exporting energy-intensive iron and steel, aluminum and urea, in addition to green fuels for shipping, aviation and road freight, with our renewable energy from solar and wind producing "essentially limitless low-cost green electricity".

Environmental Protection in a Changing Environment

The global impacts of climate change were substantiated in the recently released First National Climate Risk Assessment report [3] which identified that heat-related deaths are rising in Australia; that coastal cities and towns will experience continual flooding from higher sea-levels; and that the economic costs of increased natural disasters resulting from climate change could become ultimately unmanageable.

Invest in Green Infrastructure Management and Restoration

It is vital that governments, corporations and communities now commit to **nature repair** by halting and reversing nature loss so that species and ecosystems can start to recover for the ongoing welfare of future generations. We must ensure that government policies and investments deliver on a greener more resilient future.

The term "green infrastructure" describes the network of green spaces and water systems that deliver multiple environmental, social and economic values and services to urban communities, promoting nature-based solutions such as green corridors, urban forests, and constructed wetlands to mitigate urban heat and improve air and water quality. It strengthens the resilience of towns and cities to respond to the major challenges of growth, health, climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as water, energy and food security. In accordance with *Australian Standard: Climate Change Adaptation for Settlements and Infrastructure – a risk-based approach* (AS 5334-2013)[5], climate risk management must be integrated into planning, design, implementation and long-term governance frameworks for settlements, public assets and infrastructure projects. This standard provides a systematic, risk-based approach to identifying, analysing and treating climate risks across the lifecycle of infrastructure and urban systems, rooted in internationally recognised risk management principles (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009). AS 5334-2013 emphasises proactive adaptation planning, accountability, continuous monitoring and review — all of which are essential to future-proofing trade-enabled infrastructure and supply chains against escalating climate impacts.

Complementing this, *Standards Australia Handbook: Urban Green Infrastructure – Planning and Decision Framework* (SA HB 214:2023)[6] provides authoritative guidance on planning, commissioning, design, construction, maintenance and management of Urban Green Infrastructure. It establishes common terminology, core principles, planning processes and performance metrics for green infrastructure networks that deliver environmental, social and economic outcomes such as climate adaptation, biodiversity support, heat mitigation, water quality improvement and community health benefits. This handbook positions green infrastructure as an asset class and supports decision-making that optimises multi-functional ecosystem services within urban and regional systems (SA HB 214:2023).

The long-term economic benefits of investments in green infrastructure include community well-being, health savings, increased property values, and reduced disaster recovery costs.

In the most recent annual Leader's meeting with Indonesia on 15 May 2025, the leaders committed to strengthening Indonesia's health system and biosecurity. Australia committed to a $50 million KINETIK fund for green infrastructure, under the $200 million Australia-Indonesia Climate and Infrastructure Partnership launched in June 2022. $100 million was provided to support Indonesia's just energy transition.

Develop Integrated Planning and Design Approaches

The challenge is to develop new integrated planning, design and management approaches to landscape and all urban development that deliver sustainable outcomes in terms of economics, health and environmental systems.

Landscape Architects are leaders in generating innovative outcomes resulting from their collaborative work in green infrastructure development, contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Global Call to Action

For the last 59 years, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) has strongly advocated for nature-based solutions that support healthy, liveable cities and regions. AILA's 2025 Advocacy Manifesto[4] aligns with the global call for government policies and investments to "...enhance community well-being, protect biodiversity, and drive sustainable economic growth".

The 4 strategic priorities outlined in the Manifesto are:

Policy and Regulatory Change: stronger policies required to mandate green & blue infrastructure as global standards in urban planning, to enhance resilience, and to protect biodiversity;

Targeted Investment in Blue & Green Infrastructure: a national framework required for dedicated international and national funding and long-term investment to enhance climate resilience, improve urban liveability, and maximise economic benefits;

Improved Governance & Delivery: improved cross-border leadership, governance and coordination required to ensure integrated urban planning and successful long-term blue & green infrastructure initiatives; and

Knowledge and Capacity Building: climate resilience and urban sustainability to be strengthened by investing in global interdisciplinary education and research in nature-based solutions, while funding landscape architecture programs that address future skills shortages to empower the next generation of climate positive designers and planners.

What DFAT should do

In the context of Southeast Asia FTA modernisation, AILA encourages DFAT to consider how trade agreements can move beyond market access alone to support regulatory coherence, standards-based climate adaptation, and long-term resilience of trade-enabled infrastructure and settlements. This includes recognising green infrastructure as a trade-relevant asset class, supporting alignment with climate adaptation standards, and enabling inclusive participation by small and women-led professional services.

Gender Equity

Gender equity is one of AILA's core values. AILA aims to set and implement activity that supports gender equity for the profession. AILA's internal auditing of gender discrepancies in the profession highlighted that women were disproportionately running unincorporated businesses compared to incorporated businesses. Unincorporated businesses are likely to be small, with high rates of part-time work, suggesting that many women are setting up their own small practices or consultancies in order to attain flexibility 1. For many (but not all) women this is likely to be a way to accommodate caring responsibilities.1

In regard to Australia's Fair-Trade Agreement in Southeast Asia, it should be taken into consideration that due to the number of requirements and complex / costly tendering systems these smaller unincorporated, women-owned businesses may be unintentionally excluded from larger international / government tenders.

We recommend that the FTA:

- Incorporates gender-responsive procurement commitments or cooperation programs that build participation capacity.
- Provides support for capacity-building for women-owned small sized businesses and simplified procedures.
- Includes gender-impact assessments

Data collection and impact monitoring

- Sex specific data collection should be collected for trade participation.
- Periodic gender impact reporting should be undertaken.
- Dedicated Gender Committees or working groups should be set up under the FTA.
- This aligns with EU, Canadian and CPTPP-style models.

Relevant Documents and Links for this section:

1. Document of relevance: AILA Gender Equity: Next Steps report

Conclusion

Embedding alignment with recognised climate adaptation and green infrastructure standards within trade-enabled investment frameworks is critical to reducing risk, improving investor certainty, and strengthening the long-term resilience of infrastructure supporting regional trade.

Australia's Southeast Asia Free Trade Agreements modernisation presents a timely and strategic opportunity to embed climate resilience, nature-positive development, and social equity into the future of regional trade. As climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing environmental risks place unprecedented pressure on economies and communities, trade policy must evolve to recognise and protect natural capital as a foundational economic asset.

AILA strongly supports the integration of nature-based solutions, green and blue infrastructure, and climate-positive design principles within modernised FTAs. Investment in green infrastructure, renewable energy-enabled industries, and integrated planning and design approaches can deliver long-term economic resilience, improved public health outcomes, reduced disaster costs, and stronger environmental protection across the region. Landscape architects are uniquely positioned to contribute to these outcomes through interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and leadership in climate adaptation and mitigation.

Equally, AILA emphasises the importance of ensuring that modernised trade frameworks are inclusive and equitable. Gender-responsive procurement, simplified tendering processes, capacity-building initiatives, and robust gender impact monitoring are essential to ensuring that women-led and small practices are not unintentionally excluded from international trade opportunities. Embedding gender equity within FTAs aligns with international best practice and strengthens economic participation and innovation.

AILA urges DFAT to ensure that Southeast Asia FTA modernisation explicitly supports policies and investments that value natural capital, accelerate the green economy, strengthen regional climate resilience, and promote inclusive trade participation. By doing so, Australia can demonstrate leadership in delivering trade agreements that are economically robust, environmentally responsible, and socially equitable supporting a sustainable and prosperous future for Australia, Southeast Asia, and the broader region.

AILA welcomes continued engagement with DFAT and stands ready to contribute its expertise to support the successful modernisation and implementation of these agreements.

Should you require clarification or wish to discuss our submission further, please contact Michela Secci, Executive Officer of AILA at michela.secc@aila.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

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AILA President

References

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