

30 October 2008.

Ms Cathy Raper
Director
Trade Commitments Branch
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
R.G. Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221

Dear Ms Raper

Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement

I refer to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade request for submissions into the Government's consideration of possible participation in an expanded Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (Trans-Pacific Agreement).

The Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) is a strong supporter of trade liberalisation, primarily through the World Trade Organization, but also through the pursuit of comprehensive and liberalising regional and bilateral trade agreements. In this context the MCA welcomes the Government's decision to consider participation in the Trans-Pacific Agreement initiative.

Australia's bilateral agreements with the United States, New Zealand and Singapore and the recently concluded negotiations with Chile and ASEAN/New Zealand place Australia in a strong position to engage in negotiations to expand the Trans-Pacific Agreement.

Where there is scope, the MCA would support outcomes from a Trans-Pacific Agreement that build further on the market access and investment liberalisation delivered through our existing bilateral agreements. Also, achieving greater consistency and coherence between the existing FTAs in the region would be welcome. The MCA is most encouraged, however, by the potential strategic value of an expanded Trans-Pacific Agreement.

The Asia-Pacific region contains the mineral industry's major export markets. Investment by Australian mining companies throughout the region is also continuing to expand. Broad and deep liberalisation in the region that promoted the reform of investment regimes and dismantled "beyond the border barriers" would be of great benefit to the minerals industry and to Australia as a whole. The MCA is hopeful that an expanded Trans-Pacific Agreement could be "a basis for negotiating an Asia-Pacific regional trade agreement" as the Mortimer Review has suggested.

Each of the participants in the initiative is an APEC member. The successful negotiation of an expanded Agreement would send an important signal to all APEC members that greater region wide liberalisation and integration is possible. This in turn may reinforce the value in pursuing over time a high standard comprehensive agreement covering all APEC members.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Deady
Director – Industry Economics & Taxation