



## **Australia's National Statement:**

### **Eightieth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

#### **Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific**

Digital trade and e-commerce are transforming our region in profound ways; underpinning growth, helping MSMEs and empowering more women-led enterprises. Australia is committed to working with our regional partners to leverage digital trade rules for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Ambitious, balanced and consistent digital trade rules play a vital role in unlocking the full benefits of the digital economy for businesses of all sizes, workers and communities. Governments throughout our region have an important role to play in helping businesses make the most of the digital economy this includes negotiating rules in bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral settings.

In the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on e-commerce, of which Australia is a co-convenor with Singapore and Japan, 90 countries are working together to help support the implementation and utilisation of these rules including through development assistance and capacity building. We must seize opportunities now to make progress on global rule-making and promote a free and fair model of the digital economy for all demand-driven technical assistance and capacity building for developing countries and LDCs is needed to bridge digital divides within countries and between regions of the world the current opportunities to set consistent, inclusive, prosperity-enhancing rules for digital trade may not come again.

In February, Australia announced more than \$20 million in funding to support Indo-Pacific countries to build resilience and grow their economies sustainably through trade this includes new funding for e-commerce and digital economy initiatives. Australia has a long-standing relationship with UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to support the development of inclusive digital economies in the region our recent \$3 million funding commitment to support UNCTAD's work on e-commerce and the digital economy will include assistance to help expand and strengthen UNCTAD's eTrade for Women initiative in South and Southeast Asia.

Our international development policy is aligned with the E-Commerce: WTO and Indo-Pacific Technical Assistance and Capacity Building investment to foster digital readiness in Southeast Asia and South Asia. Last September, Prime Minister Albanese launched the report "Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040" – a blueprint for stepping up Australia's economic links with the region the report included a key recommendation that Australia work with Southeast Asian partners to expand coverage of ambitious digital trade rules, and promote interoperability through digital trade rules negotiations, advocacy and capacity building; a theme built upon at last month's ASEAN - Australia Special Summit in Melbourne.

Turning to our Pacific neighbours, we understand that digitalisation offers innovative solutions to: connect isolated areas; open new cross-border trade opportunities; and foster urban-rural integration. Australia's support to our Pacific neighbours is guided by our development partners' digital trade priorities. The Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy and

Roadmap charts a way forward where all businesses and consumers can engage in electronic commerce to transform livelihoods through inclusive and equitable economic growth. In conclusion, Australia recognises that there is no sustainable long-term economic growth without trade. We will continue to support sustainable development in our region, including supporting countries to access and benefit from the rules-based multilateral trading system and the significant opportunities afforded by digital innovation.