

Proactive Release

Date: 17 June 2020

The following Cabinet paper and related Cabinet minute have been proactively released by the Minister for Trade and Export Growth:

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon David Parker

(CAB-20-MIN-0209 refers)



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon David Parker

Portfolio **Trade and Export Growth**

On 11 May 2020, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon David Parker under CAB-20-SUB-0209 on his travel, from 12 to 14 February 2020, to Suva, Fiji, to attend the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting and the PACER-Plus Ministerial meeting.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Office of the Minister for Trade and Export Growth

Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon David Parker

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Fiji from 12 – 14 February 2020 to attend the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting and a Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus) Ministerial Meeting. The primary purpose of my visit was to engage with my Pacific counterparts on trade and economic policy issues affecting the region, and to encourage Pacific Island Countries to ratify the PACER Plus trade and development agreement.

Report

Forum Trade Ministers Meeting

- 1 The Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM) was chaired by Fiji, and was held on 13 February 2020. Eleven of the Pacific Islands Forum members were represented at ministerial level, and four at officials' level. The theme of the meeting was "Pacific Trading Nations: From Surviving to Thriving". In the face of a number of global challenges, such as the undermining of the international rules based system and the effects of climate change, the meeting sought to identify opportunities for small economies to both overcome barriers and strengthen trade facilitation.
- 2 One of the central discussions for Ministers was on the importance for small economies of a rules-based international trading system, and Ministers emphasised the need to preserve this. Although only six Pacific Island countries are World Trade Organisation members, it was agreed that WTO-related issues were of such central importance for the region that this topic would become a standing item on future agendas.
- 3 Mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change remains the core issue facing the Pacific, and was a consistent theme in all conversations. There were a number of conversations that intersected with both my environment and trade portfolio responsibilities, including around compliance with the Montreal Protocol's Kigali Amendment, fisheries and oceans issues, fuel and energy costs, and waste matters.
- 4 Ministers also reflected on the number of global health crises that were negatively affecting trade and economic stability. This included the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, the recent measles outbreak, and the emerging COVID-19 global outbreak with likely implications for tourism.

- 5 The meeting was the first of Pacific Ministers Responsible for Trade in five years, and my attendance therefore signalled New Zealand's clear focus on prosperity and sustainable development in the region. Ministers agreed that the meeting had provided a valuable opportunity for the region to discuss key trade matters, and agreed to meet again in 2021 with a view to regularising Trade Ministers' Meetings on a biennial basis.

PACER Plus Ministerial Meeting

- 6 Another focus of my visit was to support the momentum towards the entry into force of PACER Plus. A separate meeting of Ministers from PACER Plus signatory countries was held on the morning of 13 February 2020. Four countries have ratified the trade agreement, and a further four ratifications are required to trigger its entry into force. I was encouraged to hear during that meeting that it remains the intention of countries to progress ratification by June 30 of this year. Ministers released a communique which confirmed our collective commitment to PACER Plus.
- 7 I was also encouraged to hear Pacific Ministers state their appreciation for the assistance New Zealand and Australia have provided signatories through the Readiness Package. A significant part of the Ministerial Meeting focused on labour mobility, including New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme. The engagement of Ministers in this discussion was notable, and underlined the mutual benefits of the programme.

Other meetings

- 8 While in Fiji, I also took the opportunity to host a breakfast for Pacific WTO members to advocate for the statement that New Zealand intends to deliver at MC12 on fossil fuel subsidy reform. Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu Ministers expressed their interest in receiving further information on the statement, and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade will actively seek the endorsement of Pacific members over the coming months.
- 9 I also held a bilateral meeting with Attorney-General Khaiyum, who was Acting Prime Minister during the time of my visit. This was our second bilateral meeting in a short period - we met in Auckland in November - and our conversations were broad-ranging and warm. I underlined our commitment to our relationship with Fiji, including ahead of the visit to Fiji by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Covid-19

- 10 The FTMM took place ahead of the Covid-19 developments which have recently unfolded. I expect that the challenges faced by our Pacific Island neighbours, including Fiji, will be even more complex now. A priority for New Zealand is to work to help mitigate the effects of Covid-19 upon the Pacific.

Proactive release

- 11 This paper will be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO (18) 4, on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. The paper will be subject to redaction as appropriate on the grounds set out under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon David Parker

Minister for Trade and Export Growth

Proactively released by the Minister for Trade and Export Growth