

Proactive Release

Date: 10 February 2020

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

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O'Connor:

(CAB-19-MIN 643 refers)

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the Act that would apply have been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to redaction codes:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the New Zealand Government.

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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O'Connor

Portfolio Trade and Export Growth

On 9 December 2019, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Damien O'Connor under CAB-19-SUB-0643 on his travel, from 1 to 8 November 2019, to:

- 1 Bangkok, Thailand to represent New Zealand at the final Ministerial-level negotiating meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, in the margins of the East Asia Summit;
- 2 India for a bilateral visit.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Hard-copy distribution:

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister
Hon Damien O'Connor

Office of the Minister of State for Trade and Export Growth
Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O'Connor

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Bangkok from 1 to 4 November 2019 and then onto India from 5 to 8 November 2019. In Bangkok, I represented New Zealand at a Ministerial-level negotiating meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement and in India I undertook a bilateral visit as Minister of Agriculture and Minister of State for Trade and Export Growth.

Report

RCEP

- 1 In Bangkok I joined the Prime Minister for the 3rd RCEP Leaders Summit on 4 November, preceded by a meeting of RCEP Ministers on 1 November. The Summit was the target date for an announcement of conclusion of the 7 year RCEP negotiations.
- 2 s6(a)
s6(a) I throughout the discussions I continued to defend New Zealand's core interests and work with my ministerial colleagues to find solutions to the outstanding issues.
- 3 s6(a) a
joint Leaders' Statement was finally agreed by all 16 countries. Although the statement was to be issued by all 16 Leaders, India was unable to conclude text negotiations with the other 15 countries. Therefore, the statement was explicit that only 15 countries "have concluded text-based negotiations for all 20 chapters and essentially all their market access issues". The 15 also agreed to begin legal scrubbing of the text so that the agreement could be signed at the RCEP Summit in 2020.
- 4 The Leaders Statement noted that "India has significant outstanding issues, which remain unresolved. All RCEP Participating Countries will work together to resolve these outstanding issues in a mutually satisfactory way. India's final decision will depend on satisfactory resolution of these issues."
- 5 Whether India will be able to come on board with RCEP in 2020 remains to be seen, however I note that after 7 long years of negotiations the text of the RCEP Agreement has been concluded. This is a considerable achievement that represents the collective and considerable effort by many New Zealand negotiators past and present.

India

- 6 My visit to India gave a welcome boost to bilateral relations at a time when New Zealand is looking to lift its relationship. In just three days, I visited Mumbai, Delhi and Anand where engagements with government and business alike demonstrated the depth of India's interest in working with New Zealand, particularly on agriculture cooperation.
- 7 The focus of the Mumbai programme was a roundtable with New Zealand businesses operating in India, largely from the food and beverage sector, which served as a useful discussion on the challenges and opportunities of the market. In Mumbai I also visited Suri Agro Fresh, an Indian distributor for Zespri, where I opened a new cold storage facility. I also met with Indian conglomerate Future Group, with whom Fonterra has a Joint Venture. These engagements provided two concrete examples of the value of New Zealand's expertise and products in the Indian food and beverage market.
- 8 In Delhi, I met with counterpart Indian ministers responsible for trade, dairying and animal husbandry, agriculture and farmers' welfare (for horticulture), and health (for food safety). All of the meetings were insightful and my Indian counterparts expressed interest in deepening the relationship with New Zealand. I also gave a speech to Indian business representatives facilitated by the Confederation of Indian Industries and went on a tour of a wholesale fruit market where New Zealand produce is sold.
- 9 My visit to the home of Indian dairy in Anand, Gujarat, provided a chance to see the industry in action first hand. I met with senior representatives from Amul, India's largest and most vocal dairy cooperative, and the National Dairy Development Board, as well as touring local small farms and a milk collection centre. These engagements served to highlight both the scale of the industry, which includes millions of small farmers with only one or two cows, as well as the high tech sophistication of some parts of it.

Proactive release

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

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Damien O'Connor

Minister of State for Trade and Export Growth