

# Proactive Release

Date: 22 February 2022

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

<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>Minute of Decision – Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O’Connor</i>	CAB-21-MIN-0526
<i>Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O’Connor</i>	

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 OIA). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the OIA 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 OIA redaction codes:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 9(2)(j): to avoid prejudice to negotiations.



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Damien O'Connor

**Portfolio**                      **Trade and Export Growth**

On 13 December 2021, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Damien O'Connor under CAB-21-SUB-0526 on his travel, from 13 to 25 June 2021, to Singapore, France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium for bilateral discussions.

Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

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Minister of Trade and Export Growth

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Office of the Minister 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 Singapore, France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium from 13-25 June 2021.

### **Report**

#### *Singapore*

- 1 The reason for my travel to Singapore was to reaffirm New Zealand's strategic value to Singapore and strengthen relationships with Singaporean counterparts in support of the export-led recovery from COVID-19, APEC 2021, the digital economy and the agri-food relationship.
- 2 Whilst in Singapore, I spoke with the Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong, and the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu about New Zealand's trade recovery, and sought to understand the opportunities and challenges COVID-19 has created for Singapore.
- 3 In addition to Ministerial meetings, I gave a "Beehive Briefing" to members of the New Zealand Chamber in Singapore, and met with NZ Inc. agency heads.
- 4 I also undertook an interview with Channel New Asia (CNA) on both regional trade issues and the bilateral relationship with Singapore.
- 5 The key themes to emerge from the visit were:
  - how New Zealand and Singapore can work together to continue as defenders of (and pathfinders for) the open, rules-based international order; and
  - How we can we safely move to more face-to-face interaction and prepare the ground now so that, when it's safe to do so, we can visit each other; and
  - the twin global challenges of COVID and climate change

#### *The United Kingdom*

- 6 My travel to the UK was critical to progressing New Zealand's free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the UK at the political level. I agreed with my counterpart, Secretary Elizabeth Truss, our intention to reach agreement



in principle on the FTA in August.<sup>s6(a)</sup>

- 7 I also underlined the case for the FTA in the context of the wider bilateral relationship to a broader UK audience, and demonstrated to New Zealand businesses and other stakeholders that the Government is committed to reinvigorating international connections as part of the broader COVID-19 recovery, of which a high-quality, comprehensive and inclusive FTA is a key cornerstone.
- 8 I met with Agriculture Secretary George Eustice and National Farmers' Union President, and the Chair of Parliament's Agriculture Committee, to whom I reiterated New Zealand's high animal welfare standards, addressed misperceptions about New Zealand's ability to "flood" the UK market, and outlined opportunities in agricultural trade for the UK. I also met with Cabinet Minister Lord Frost, where I made the case for the FTA.<sup>s6(a)</sup>
- 9 My engagements with UK and New Zealand business representatives provided insights into the UK business environment, and the value that UK business is placing on what an NZ-UK deal could achieve for small to medium enterprises and on sustainability, innovation, digital services, and services in particular. A meeting with UK Parliament's International Trade Committee MPs highlighted the interest in the UK's accession to the CPTPP, and the NZ-UK FTA as a stepping stone to this.
- 10 In each of these meetings, UK counterparts framed the wider relationship positively, highlighting the many issues on which we are likeminded, particularly in trade. These engagements underlined the importance of our ongoing engagement, and of making the broader strategic case for the FTA. This includes that our FTA will be a 'gold standard' for the UK's trade agenda, a stepping-stone for CPTPP in line with the UK's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific, and should be part of a valued, long-standing and likeminded partnership.

#### *France*

- 11 In France I met with my counterpart, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness Franck Riester, to discuss the way forward on the EU-NZ FTA, in which we had a frank and open discussion<sup>s6(a), s9(2)(j)</sup>
- 12 While in Paris I also met with Thierry Mallet, CEO of Transdev (public transportation company operating train services in Auckland and Wellington), and who is also the chair of the New Zealand chapter of MEDEF, France's largest business federation. MEDEF voiced their support for the NZ-EU FTA,



and we discussed trade and investment opportunities including in hydrogen energy.

- 13 I also met with Sabine Thillaye, Chair of the National Assembly's European Affairs Select Committee, for discussions on areas of mutual interest in FTA negotiations.
- 14 My programme also included an interview with *La France agricole*, the most widely read agricultural trade magazine in Europe. I spoke about New Zealand's climate ambitions, animal welfare standards and the benefits of the EU-NZ FTA, with a view to addressing misconceptions about the impact of an FTA on the sector and the level of regulations underpinning the New Zealand industry.

### *Belgium*

- 15 During my travel to Belgium I sought to reinforce the value the New Zealand Government places upon our relationship with the European Union.
- 16 My visit to Brussels took place immediately before Round 11 of our FTA negotiations, allowing me to provide a firm and clear set of expectations and parameters to our EU counterparts. Undertaking these meetings in person instead of online allowed for a far more frank and direct discussion, which I believe has added momentum to our FTA talks. Discussions around the FTA indicated that the broad outline of a deal is within sight,  
s6(a), s9(2)(j)
- 17 Demonstrating New Zealand's value proposition as a like-minded partner, increasing global ambition on agricultural greenhouse gas emissions reduction, sustainable approaches to agricultural production, and animal welfare were also priorities during my visit.
- 18 I spent a productive four hours with the EU Commissioner responsible for trade, Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis, in which we were able to progress discussion on a FTA with the EU.
- 19 I also met with EU Commissioner responsible for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski over lunch for a discussion on our respective agriculture policies and challenges, and progressing our FTA.
- 20 In meetings with Members of the European Parliament, including with Bernd Lange (Chair of the European Parliament's international trade committee), Norbit Lins (Chair of the Agriculture Committee), Ulrike Muller and Axel Voss, with business (including the CEO of Business Europe) and with civil society (including the leaders of the European Trade Union Confederation) I advocated for the FTA and its significance for both New Zealand and EU, with a view to strengthening the constituency of support for the FTA. I also met with representatives from Mainfreight and Zespri kiwifruit.

- 21 I also participated in two detailed interviews with Brussels-based media organisations *Politico* and *Borderlex*, in which I discussed the benefits of a NZ-EU FTA, the current state of negotiations and climate-related issues.
- 22 While in Brussels, I also undertook a bilateral call with Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Europe, Trade and Foreign Affairs, Sophie Wilmès. I took the opportunity to express New Zealand's gratitude for New Zealand's Pfizer vaccines, all of which are currently being produced and exported from Belgium, and advocated for Belgium's support for a comprehensive FTA with the EU.

### **Proactive release**

- 23 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 Officials Information Act 1982.

### **Recommendation**

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Damien O'Connor

Minister for Trade and Export Growth

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Minister of Trade and Export Growth