



A speech by the

**Minister for Trade**

**&**

**Deputy Leader of The Nationals**

**The Hon Mark Vaile MP**

On the occasion of the

Signing of the Australia-United States Free Trade  
Agreement

Washington, 18 May 2004

(Check Against Delivery)

Thank you very much Ambassador Zoellick, Secretaries, Members of Congress, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here on behalf of the Government of Australia to sign the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement.

This is an historic day in bilateral relations between the USA and Australia - today's signing is a crucial step in implementing what we expect to be a major new chapter in our commercial relationship.

Together we have found a political and economic balance that represents a major win for both of our countries.

The text we have agreed and are signing today will be a solid platform on which our business people can develop their relations with each other over coming years and decades. It is a comprehensive agreement that covers the full range of industry sectors from agriculture to audio-visual.

This agreement puts our trade and investment relationship with the United States on the same footing as our well-established political and strategic relationship – **this is the commercial equivalent of the ANZUS treaty.**

- We share a profound and absolute belief in freedom, democracy and the rule of law.
  
- Just as we stand together in our fight against global terrorism, we stand together against protectionism, we both believe in the rights of the individual and their right to compete in open markets.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to congratulate President Bush and Prime Minister Howard for their vision and thank them for their support. Could I also pay tribute to my counterpart, Ambassador Bob Zoellick and his team of Ralph, Josette and Al for their commitment to getting this deal done.

The negotiations at ministerial level reflected the fact that there were hard issues that needed to be worked through - on both sides.

We both had clear mandates to advance and defend.

Compromises had to be found on sensitive issues - and they were. And both sides worked hard to ensure a good outcome.

It is timely also for me to acknowledge the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Secretary Ashton Calvert, the Australian negotiating team, led by Steve Deady, and our Embassy staff under the guidance of Ambassador Michael Thawley. Their efforts were absolutely fundamental in getting us to where we are today.

Our commitment to ensuring the Agreement enters into force as quickly as possible is stronger than ever.

It therefore gives me particular pleasure to be back here in Washington just three short months after we concluded the negotiations to sign the Agreement on behalf of Australia.

In that time we have also been busy in Australia – and here in the US - talking extensively to the business community about the many opportunities the Agreement has to offer

We have also commenced the required parliamentary and legislative processes.

Two Parliamentary Committees are currently examining the Agreement in Australia and taking evidence from a wide range of Australians.

We expect to be ready to table the enabling legislation in the Australian Parliament by late June - so we can achieve the agreed implementation date of 1 January 2005.

Today's signing also clears the way for the next step in the United States process and brings us closer to bringing the Agreement into force by January next year.

I especially want to thank the supporters of the Australian-US free trade agreement in the US congress. Congresswoman Dunn and Congressman Dooley have been there from the start and we thank you for your leadership.

We sense strong and growing support for this FTA in Congress and look forward to its early passage.

Likewise, I want to pay tribute to the many supporters from the business community here today who are playing such an important part in promoting the agreement with Congress.

As part of this effort, I am taking the opportunity during my visit to discuss the mutual benefits of the Agreement with United States Congressional and business interests.

From Australia's point of view I can assure you that the importance of this deal is understood by the majority of Australia's peak business bodies and industry associations - who have committed publicly to support the agreement.

Ladies and gentlemen

Australia and the United States already have a long-established and well-developed trading relationship.

But through this Agreement, we are also making clear our commitment to continued growth and diversification of our trade and economic relationship.

It is a deal that will deliver real benefits and opportunities for both sides from the day it enters into force - and will ensure the entrepreneurial spirit in both our countries has room to flourish.

Both Australia and the United States are staunch supporters of trade liberalisation.

We know that dynamic, open and efficient economies lead to higher growth, better living standards and more jobs.

It was important therefore that this Agreement set high standards for other Free Trade Agreements – and it does.

This Agreement, only the third between developed countries, highlights the leading and innovative role of our two countries in advancing the international trade agenda.

Negotiating liberalisation at the multilateral level is not easy, but it is an objective Australia and the US share.

As we work hard at the bilateral level to create opportunities and improve market access through this FTA, we are also strongly committed to advancing the Doha Round.

The opportunities for trade and business under this Agreement are about giving our economies and our commercial sectors room to grow and expand.

Our work in Australia to create a strong, efficient economic environment goes hand in hand with this

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen.

The things that unite our two great nations have endured the test of time, the blood of young Australians and Americans has been shed on most continents of the world in defence of our shared ideals of freedom and democracy.

As we speak, our troops are engaged in a physical and psychological battle in Iraq.

We, as strong and lasting allies, have made this commitment so that future generations of Iraqis have the opportunity to enjoy the freedom and prosperity that we do. Just remember that evil prevails when good men do nothing.

Ladies and gentlemen.

This is an historic agreement between our two great nations, a great opportunity to further forge the bonds of friendship and trust across our two economies.

I commend this agreement to you and urge the US Congress and the Australian Parliament to pass it as soon as possible.

Thank you.

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