

**Australian National Statement  
72nd UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)  
15-19 May 2016, Bangkok**

Australia is very grateful for Thailand's hosting of the 72nd Commission, and for Dr Shamshad Akhtar and the ESCAP Secretariat's continuing support to member states, particularly on the important theme for this year's Commission.

Extraordinary technological change is transforming how we live, work, communicate and pursue new ways of thinking. We as a global community need to embrace new ideas in innovation and science, and harness new sources of growth to deliver economic prosperity and development in our region.

With the agreement of the 2030 Agenda, world leaders provided a clear message that business as usual on development is no longer an option, and that we will all have to think and operate differently to realise the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (Addis Agenda).

Innovation is crucial to delivering the 2030 Agenda and is a key priority for Australia. In December 2015 we launched our National Innovation and Science Agenda, putting innovation at the centre of all our major policies. We aim to establish Australia as a leading innovation system by focusing on four priority areas:

- **Culture and capital**, to help businesses embrace risk and incentivise startup investment;
- **Collaboration**, to increase engagement between businesses, universities and the research sector to commercialise ideas and solve problems;
- **Talent and skills**, to train students for the jobs of the future and attract innovative talent to Australia; and
- For the **Government to lead by example**, in the way we invest in and use technology and data in delivering better quality services.

Internationally we will support this Agenda by continuing to enhance our profile as a valued and capable partner in science, research and innovation.

We are proud to be a member of ESCAP's STI [*Science, Technology and Innovation*] Advisory Group and are committed to focussing global attention and innovation on the development challenges facing our regional neighbours.

Australia established an "innovationXchange" to catalyse and support innovation across our aid program. Through it we seek to source and test new solutions that tackle poverty and promote economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region.

Supporting science and technology is at its forefront. This was demonstrated during our 2016 Pacific Humanitarian Challenge - an open challenge inviting innovative solutions to natural disaster response in the

Pacific. The winning proposals announced this month involved the use of lightweight drones, mesh telecommunications technology that functions independently of a mobile network, and mobile-based micro-insurance. These ideas - which blend technology, science and development innovation - could be transformative in helping Pacific Islands to rebuild and recover after natural disasters.

Australia is committed to promoting entrepreneurship and private sector growth as mechanisms for achieving development outcomes. A key question for our region is how to incentivise the private sector – in all its forms – to take an approach to STI which considers not only economic gain, but also environmental sustainability and social impact.

To this end, we are driving an ambitious social entrepreneurship and financing agenda – aimed at equipping social enterprises with the skills, networks, and access to markets required to make their business models both investable and scalable.

With ocean economic activity estimated at USD\$3 – 5 trillion per year globally, we must also look at how we can unleash the economic potential of oceans in an efficient, equitable and sustainable way. Australia is now testing the frontiers of what marine scientists and entrepreneurs can achieve in the Indian Ocean with the Blue Economy Challenge. The challenge aims to tackle some of the most pressing problems concerning the sustainability of ocean resources and exemplifies our close partnership with Australia's scientific community.

Women bring different perspectives, skills and experiences to the table. Currently women count for less than one in five of those working in the field of science. If we do not fully integrate women into STI we will as region fall short in meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. STI can also be a significant catalyst for gender equality. Women's access to, and use of, new technologies – not least in banking, health and education – continue to change their lives for the better.

We must also promote innovative ways to ensure development actively is inclusive of people with disabilities. Australia has implemented a strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development across our aid program. This supports innovative approaches such as making disaster risk reduction and response measures more inclusive, by drawing directly on the lived experience of people with disabilities in the Pacific.

To have an effective national or regional innovation framework, it is vital to bring together the unique knowledge and abilities of the corporate sector, academia, civil society and government. We do not have to be experts in every field to achieve economic, environmental and social impact, but we must be able to work together.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all innovation and development framework in our diverse region. We must be open to cross- and sub-regional approaches and principles that can be adapted to different contexts. We commend the work ESCAP and Member States are doing on implementation of the SDGs in Pacific Island Countries, that aims to

ensure an integrated and coherent approach to the unique challenges these island nations face.

Australia's aid program is well aligned with the 2030 Agenda and supports progress towards the SDGs including through investments in: gender equality and women's empowerment; food security, agriculture and fisheries; health and education; infrastructure, trade and international competitiveness, among other important sectors. Australia has made early commitments further to the 2030 Agenda, including Goal 17 and the Addis Agenda.

Australia is an active participant in global and regional discussions regarding implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including follow-up and review processes and the development of regional and sub-regional indicators. We are supportive of these processes, particularly through ESCAP and the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with Member States, the Executive Secretary and the Secretariat, and to work together in ensuring innovation can help bring prosperity and opportunity to all of us in the Asia-Pacific.

Thank you.