

Background to the inquiry

- 1.1 On 15 June 2005 the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) resolved that the Trade Sub-Committee (the committee) would examine the operation of the free trade agreements with Singapore, Thailand and the United States, with particular reference to:
- business experience of the free trade agreements, in particular participation in negotiations and support from Australian agencies in-country;
 - government and business perspectives on what works well and what could be improved in the operation of the agreements; and
 - issues to consider for future free trade agreements.
- 1.2 Apart from the considerable value for the committee of obtaining current information on each of the free trade agreements, the inquiry was intended to assist the committee in its ongoing consideration of different aspects of Australia's current and future free trade agreements.¹

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.3 The inquiry was conducted in the form of a half-day roundtable, held on 19 August 2005. Participants were invited, and included representatives from government, business and industry, trade unions and universities. Proceedings were open to the public.

¹ The text of the agreements, and information on agreements under consideration, can be found on DFAT's Free Trade Agreements website: www.fta.gov.au.

- 1.4 The committee believed the roundtable format would allow it to hear a range of views and would facilitate discussion amongst participants. The committee was pleased with the outcome and intends to hold annual roundtables on the free trade agreements.
- 1.5 The roundtable was held between 9am and 12pm and was structured as follows:
- Session 1: Negotiations and Consultations – what went well, what didn't?
 - Session 2: FTAs in Operation – the impact on trade and on business and industry
 - Session 3: Lessons for the future.
- 1.6 The roundtable was constructed around thematic topics, rather than around individual agreements, because the committee was interested in drawing out issues common to the three FTAs. A number of issues emerged and they are discussed in the next chapter.
- 1.7 The transcript of proceedings is available on the committee's website.²

² www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt.