

SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with Africa

Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth

Parliament of Australia

Submitted by:

Tayo Oriowo

Senior Business Analyst & Technology Practitioner

Founder, SyncSkills

December 2025

DOCUMENT OUTLINE

This submission is structured as follows:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of opportunities, strategic positioning considerations, and priority recommendations

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE COMMITTEE

Five decision implications for rapid reference

SECTION 1: AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

Professional background and distinct contribution to the inquiry

SECTION 2: THE NATURE OF AUSTRALIA'S EXISTING TRADE AND INVESTMENT RELATIONS

(Term of Reference 1)

Current trade snapshot, sectoral composition, comparative context, Tanzania case study

SECTION 3: BARRIERS AND IMPEDIMENTS TO TRADE AND INVESTMENT

(Term of Reference 2)

Perception risk, trade finance gaps, representation, diaspora expertise, SME support

SECTION 4: OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSES TO DIVERSIFY EXPORTS

(Term of Reference 3)

Priority markets (Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa) and sector opportunities

SECTION 5: THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA)

(Term of Reference 4)

Understanding AfCFTA, changed economics, leverage strategies, window for positioning

SECTION 6: THE ROLE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

(Term of Reference 5)

Current engagement, opportunities for enhancement, diaspora networks as trade infrastructure

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

Seven actionable recommendations with rationale, outcomes, and responsible stakeholders

CONCLUSION

Summary and call to action on the time-limited window for strategic repositioning

KEY DATA SOURCES AND REFERENCES

Sources for statistics and data cited throughout the submission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why Africa Matters Now for Australia

Africa represents one of the most significant untapped opportunities for Australian trade diversification. With a combined GDP of approximately US\$2.8 trillion in 2025, a population of 1.4 billion people (projected to double by 2050), and the world's largest free trade area now operational under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the economic fundamentals for engagement have never been stronger.

Australia's current trade with Africa reached \$11 billion in 2023, with Australian mining companies holding approximately \$60 billion in investments across the continent. Yet this engagement remains heavily concentrated in extractives, with limited diversification into services, education, agriculture, and technology sectors where Australia holds demonstrated comparative advantages.

This submission approaches Australia-Africa trade and investment not solely through traditional export or capital-flows analysis, but through the operational layer where policy, workforce capability, and market execution intersect. It draws on direct experience supporting skilled migrants to function effectively within Australia's economy and observing how diaspora networks already facilitate trade, services, and investment between Australia and African markets.

Key Opportunities

- **AfCFTA Implementation:** With 48 countries ratified and 19 actively trading under AfCFTA rules, a unified market of 1.4 billion consumers is emerging. Australia's June 2025 MOU with the AfCFTA Secretariat provides a foundation for deeper engagement.
- **Critical Minerals Alignment:** Africa hosts 30% of global mineral reserves, including critical minerals essential for the energy transition. Australian mining expertise positions the country as a preferred partner for responsible resource development.
- **Services Export Expansion:** Education, financial services, and professional services represent underexploited growth sectors. Africa's median age of 19 represents an enormous demand pipeline for skills development.
- **Diaspora-Enabled Pathways:** Approximately 496,000 African-born people live in Australia, representing an underutilised resource for trade facilitation, market intelligence, and relationship brokerage.

Strategic Positioning Considerations

- **Competitive Landscape:** Major economies are expanding their Africa engagement. China's trade with Africa reached US\$295.5 billion in 2024. The EU maintains significant FDI stock. Canada has expanded to 17 trade offices across Africa. Australia has an opportunity to differentiate through quality, governance standards, and targeted sector expertise rather than competing on scale.
- **Perception Gap:** Information asymmetry and outdated perceptions of African markets deter SME engagement despite demonstrated returns for companies already operating in the region.
- **Resourcing Alignment:** Current trade support infrastructure could be better aligned with the scale of existing Australian commercial presence and emerging opportunities.

Priority Recommendations

1. **Establish dedicated Africa Trade Desks within Austrade** with sector specialists in mining services, education, agri-tech, and financial services, expanding beyond the current single trade commissioner model.
2. **Create a Diaspora Trade Advisory Council** to formally integrate African-Australian business expertise into trade policy development and market opportunity identification.
3. **Develop an Africa SME Export Pathway Program** providing targeted support including market intelligence, trade finance facilitation, and in-market landing support for small and medium enterprises.
4. **Implement skills-for-trade diplomacy initiatives** that leverage Australia's education and vocational training expertise to build long-term commercial relationships.
5. **Expand Export Finance Australia's Africa portfolio** with dedicated facilities for African market entry, addressing the trade finance gap that currently disadvantages Australian exporters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE COMMITTEE

Five decision implications from this submission:

- 1. Africa engagement is already occurring, but largely outside formal policy frameworks.** Australian businesses have \$60 billion invested in Africa. Policy infrastructure has not kept pace with commercial reality. The question is not whether to engage, but whether to do so strategically.
- 2. Diaspora networks function as trade infrastructure but are not recognised as such.** The 496,000 African-born Australians represent market intelligence, trust brokerage, and transaction facilitation capabilities that remain systematically untapped by trade policy.
- 3. AfCFTA creates scale economics Australia is currently not positioned to leverage.** A unified market of 1.4 billion consumers is emerging. The June 2025 MOU provides a framework, but implementation mechanisms are needed to convert intent into commercial outcomes.
- 4. Australia can compete on quality, not scale.** While larger economies engage Africa through volume, Australia's comparative advantage lies in governance standards, technical expertise, and sectors like education and mining services where reputation matters.
- 5. This inquiry represents a narrow window for strategic repositioning.** Trade frameworks, standards, and commercial relationships are being established now through AfCFTA implementation. Early engagement shapes the architecture; late entry means adapting to frameworks designed by others.

SECTION 1: AUTHOR INTRODUCTION

About the Author

Tayo Oriowo is a senior business analyst and technology practitioner with professional experience spanning enterprise delivery, workforce capability development, and skilled migrant integration within Australia's regulated economy. She currently works within one of Australia's largest customer-owned financial institutions, where she supports complex business and technology initiatives that require strong governance, stakeholder alignment, and delivery discipline. This role demands an applied understanding of how policy intent translates into operational systems, risk controls, and measurable outcomes.

In parallel with her corporate role, Tayo operates through SyncSkills, a workforce development and skills-translation organisation focused on supporting skilled migrants and internationally trained professionals to function effectively within the Australian labour market. Through this work, she has been directly involved in helping professionals from diverse global backgrounds, including African markets, convert existing expertise into locally relevant, employer-ready capability. This includes addressing practical barriers such as skills interpretation, professional standards, communication norms, and employer expectations, rather than treating migrant capability as a deficit.

Tayo's work through SyncSkills provides ongoing exposure to the structural friction points that affect productivity, labour market participation, and economic contribution among skilled migrants. These insights are particularly relevant to trade and investment discussions, as human capital, professional services, and diaspora-led enterprise form a significant but underutilised component of Australia's economic engagement with Africa.

Her perspective is further informed by lived experience as an immigrant with sustained engagement across African professional and diaspora networks. Through this engagement, Tayo has observed how informal trade, services exports, skills transfer, and early-stage investment flows often occur outside formal trade frameworks, despite their tangible economic impact. This includes the role of diaspora professionals as market connectors, risk mitigators, and trust intermediaries between Australian institutions and African markets.

Positioning Note: Distinct Contribution to the Inquiry

This submission is distinct in that it approaches Australia-Africa trade and investment not solely through traditional export or capital-flows analysis, but through the operational layer where policy, workforce capability, and market execution intersect. It draws on direct experience supporting skilled migrants to function effectively within Australia's economy and observing how diaspora networks already facilitate trade, services, and investment between Australia and African markets.

As such, it offers Committee members practical insights into how human capital, professional services, and diaspora-enabled engagement can be deliberately integrated into Australia's trade and investment strategy with Africa, areas that are often acknowledged in principle but under-developed in implementation.

SECTION 2: THE NATURE OF AUSTRALIA'S EXISTING TRADE AND INVESTMENT RELATIONS WITH AFRICA

(Term of Reference 1)

Current Trade Snapshot

Australia's two-way trade with Africa reached \$11 billion in 2023, representing approximately 1.2% of Australia's total trade. While modest in global terms, this figure has grown substantially from \$5.7 billion in 2010, reflecting increasing commercial engagement despite limited government trade promotion resources dedicated to the continent.

Investment Profile: Australian mining companies hold approximately \$60 billion in investments across Africa's extractive industries as of 2024. There are 113 ASX-listed mining companies with operations across the continent, encompassing nearly 270 properties. This makes Australia one of the largest sources of mining investment in Africa, though this engagement is heavily concentrated in the resources sector.

Geographic Concentration: Investment is concentrated in Southern and East Africa, with particular focus on South Africa, Tanzania (\$3.6 billion in Australian mining investment with 12 companies committing \$26 million in exploration activities in 2024 alone), Ghana, Namibia, and emerging engagement in West African gold-producing nations.

Sectoral Composition

Sector	Key Characteristics
Mining & Resources	\$60 billion invested; 113 ASX-listed companies; focus on gold, copper, lithium, rare earths, graphite
Mining Equipment, Technology & Services (METS)	40% of METS companies export to Africa; one-third have in-country offices
Financial & Insurance Services	Second largest sector after mining; includes banking services, insurance, superannuation advisory
Education Services	Growing but underweight; Australia Awards program provides foundation; alumni networks in government and business
Agriculture & Food	Emerging; opportunities in wheat, dairy, agricultural technology, and livestock genetics

Comparative Context: Strategic Positioning

Understanding Australia's position requires context on how other economies are engaging Africa. This is not to suggest Australia should match the scale of larger economies, but rather to identify where Australia can differentiate and compete effectively.

Country	Trade with Africa	Engagement Model	Australia's Differentiation
China	US\$295.5 billion (2024)	Scale; infrastructure; state financing	Governance standards; ESG credentials; technical expertise
EU	EUR 247bn exports (2022)	Development finance; regulatory alignment	Agility; mining expertise; education quality

Country	Trade with Africa	Engagement Model	Australia's Differentiation
Canada	Mining-focused	17 trade offices; dedicated strategy	Similar strengths; opportunity for coordination
Australia	A\$11 billion (2023)	Mining investment; 2025 AfCFTA MOU	Quality positioning; diaspora networks; niche expertise

Note: Trade figures reflect different methodologies across sources. China-Africa figures from Boston University Global Development Policy Center; EU figures from Eurostat; Australian figures from DFAT. Direct comparison should account for these methodological differences.

Strategic Implication: Australia cannot and need not compete with China or the EU on volume. Australia's opportunity lies in quality differentiation: governance standards that African governments increasingly value, technical expertise in priority sectors, and the trust advantage that comes with Australia's reputation for fair dealing in resource partnerships.

Case Study: Australian Mining Success in Tanzania

Tanzania demonstrates both the potential and the pathway for Australian commercial engagement in Africa. According to Austrade's 2024 research, 12 Australian companies have committed over US\$26 million towards exploration activities in Tanzania, contributing to an estimated US\$3.6 billion in total Australian mining investment in the country.

Key success factors include Tanzania's improving regulatory environment, infrastructure investments including the Standard Gauge Railway, and receptiveness to Australian mining practices. In 2023, Tanzania signed US\$667 million in deals with Australian critical mineral developers including Peak Rare Earths, Ecograf, and Evolution Energy Minerals. Black Rock Mining secured US\$40 million in financing for its Mahenge graphite project through a partnership with South Korean steel manufacturer POSCO in September 2024.

This case illustrates how Australian expertise in mining governance, environmental management, and community engagement creates competitive advantages in markets seeking responsible resource development partners.

SECTION 3: BARRIERS AND IMPEDIMENTS TO TRADE AND INVESTMENT

(Term of Reference 2)

3.1 Perception Risk and Information Asymmetry

Perhaps the most significant barrier to Australian business engagement with Africa is not market fundamentals but perception. Africa is routinely characterised in Australian business discourse through a risk-first lens, with narratives emphasising instability, corruption, and operational complexity while understating the substantial returns being achieved by companies already operating in the region.

This perception gap is reinforced by limited media coverage of commercial success stories, absence of Africa-specific market intelligence in mainstream business channels, and a tendency to treat 54 distinct national markets as a homogenous 'high-risk' category. The result is systematic undervaluation of opportunity by Australian SMEs that might otherwise explore African market entry.

Opportunity: Sustained government-supported information initiatives could counter risk misperceptions and highlight Australian success stories. The annual Africa Down Under conference in Perth provides some visibility, but this reaches a relatively narrow audience already engaged with the continent.

3.2 Trade Finance and Insurance Gaps

Access to trade finance remains a critical constraint for Australian businesses seeking to engage with African markets. Export Finance Australia (EFA) has limited exposure to African transactions, and commercial banks typically apply conservative risk weightings that make standard trade finance products uneconomical for African market entry.

The AfCFTA Secretariat has specifically identified 'accessible and affordable trade finance solutions' as essential for successful implementation of the continental free trade area. Australian businesses face particular disadvantage relative to competitors who benefit from dedicated development finance facilities.

Opportunity: A dedicated Africa trade finance facility within Australia's export credit architecture could address this gap and position Australian exporters more competitively.

3.3 Trade Representation Considerations

Austrade currently operates three offices across Africa served by one trade commissioner. This resourcing reflects historical priorities but may warrant review given the scale of existing Australian commercial engagement (\$60 billion in mining investment) and emerging opportunities under AfCFTA.

By comparison, Canada has expanded to 17 trade offices with multiple senior staff, reflecting a strategic decision to prioritise Africa engagement. This is not to suggest Australia should match Canadian resourcing, but rather to note that trade support infrastructure could be better aligned with commercial reality.

Opportunity: Targeted expansion of Austrade presence in priority markets (Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa) would improve opportunity identification and market entry support for Australian businesses.

3.4 Diaspora Expertise: An Untapped Resource

Approximately 496,000 African-born people live in Australia, representing 1.9% of the total population. This community includes significant professional expertise, established business networks across African markets, and cultural-linguistic capabilities essential for navigating local commercial environments. Yet this resource remains systematically underutilised in Australia's trade architecture.

Through my work with SyncSkills, I observe daily how skilled African professionals in Australia maintain active commercial, investment, and knowledge-transfer relationships with their countries of origin. These flows, often informal and unquantified, represent existing trade infrastructure that could be formalised and scaled with appropriate policy support.

The diaspora currently operates largely outside official trade frameworks. There is no structured mechanism for diaspora expertise to inform market opportunity identification, no formal pathway for diaspora-led businesses to access export support, and no systematic recognition of diaspora professionals as trade facilitators.

Opportunity: A formal framework for leveraging African-Australian expertise in trade policy development and delivery could significantly enhance Australia's competitive positioning, following models established by the UK and Canada.

3.5 SME Support Architecture

The Australian Government's export support architecture includes dedicated programs for Southeast Asia (Invested strategy, Landing Pads, AIBX program), India (expanded AIBX allocation), and other priority markets. Africa-specific SME export support is less developed.

This gap is particularly consequential because African market entry typically requires higher levels of relationship-building, regulatory navigation, and local partnership development than more familiar markets. Without tailored support, Australian SMEs may default to 'easier' markets even where African opportunities might offer superior returns.

SECTION 4: OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSES TO DIVERSIFY EXPORTS

(Term of Reference 3)

4.1 Priority Market Analysis

The following markets represent priority opportunities for Australian export diversification based on economic scale, growth trajectory, regulatory environment, existing Australian commercial presence, and strategic alignment with Australian capabilities.

Nigeria: West Africa's Economic Anchor

Market Overview: Nigeria is Africa's largest economy with a GDP of approximately US\$450 billion and a population exceeding 220 million. It commenced AfCFTA trading in July 2024 with initial exports to Cameroon, Kenya, Algeria, Uganda, and Egypt. Nigeria represents a gateway to the broader West African market of 400+ million consumers.

- **Education & Skills:** Massive demand for vocational training, STEM education, and professional certification. Nigerian students represent a growing segment of Australia's international education market.
- **Fintech & Digital Services:** Nigeria has Africa's most vibrant fintech ecosystem. Australian fintech capabilities in payments, RegTech, and digital banking align well with market needs.
- **Agri-tech:** Agricultural productivity improvement is a national priority. Australian precision agriculture, water management, and livestock genetics expertise have strong applicability.

Kenya: East Africa's Commercial Hub

Market Overview: Kenya serves as East Africa's financial and logistics hub with sophisticated banking, telecommunications, and professional services sectors. It is actively trading under AfCFTA rules and hosts the African Development Bank's East African operations.

- **Financial Services:** Kenya's banking sector is the most developed in East Africa. Opportunities exist in wealth management, insurance products, and superannuation advisory services.
- **Renewable Energy:** Kenya has ambitious renewable energy targets. Australian expertise in solar, wind, and battery storage aligns with development priorities.
- **Education:** Austrade notes significant Australian university alumni in Kenyan government and business, creating established relationship networks for education services expansion.

Ghana: Stability and Resource Wealth

Market Overview: Ghana is one of Africa's most stable democracies and hosts the AfCFTA Secretariat in Accra. It is actively trading under AfCFTA and has a well-developed mining sector with established Australian commercial presence.

- **Mining Services:** Ghana is a major gold producer with significant Australian METS presence. Atlantic Lithium is advancing Ghana's first lithium project with an environmental permit granted in September 2024.
- **Agribusiness:** Cocoa value-addition, food processing, and agricultural technology present growth opportunities.

Rwanda: Innovation Hub

Market Overview: Rwanda is projected to achieve 7% GDP growth in 2025, the threshold required for significant poverty reduction. It has positioned itself as a technology and innovation hub with strong governance credentials.

- **Digital Services & ICT:** Rwanda's digital transformation agenda creates opportunities for Australian software, cybersecurity, and digital government solutions.
- **Healthcare Technology:** Drone delivery of medical supplies, telemedicine, and health system digitisation represent growth sectors.

South Africa: Regional Powerhouse

Market Overview: South Africa remains Africa's most industrialised economy with sophisticated financial markets, established rule of law, and deep trade relationships with Australia.

- **Mining & Critical Minerals:** South Africa hosts significant Australian mining operations including Orion Minerals' Okiep Copper Project supported by Industrial Development Corporation funding.
- **Professional Services:** Legal, accounting, engineering, and management consulting services with Australian standards recognition.

4.2 Sector Opportunities

Education and Skills Development

Africa's median age of 19 years represents an extraordinary demand pipeline for education and skills development. By 2050, the continent's working-age population will increase by approximately 740 million people. Current annual entry of 12 million youth into labour markets vastly exceeds the 3 million formal jobs created annually, creating urgent demand for vocational training, professional certification, and skills development.

Australia's education exports were valued at \$51.5 billion in 2024. Africa represents a small but growing segment of this market. The Australia Awards program, while reduced from historical levels, has created alumni networks across government and business that Austrade identifies as a comparative advantage for Australian commercial engagement.

Opportunity: Offshore delivery of vocational training aligned with AfCFTA priority sectors including automotive, pharmaceutical, transport and logistics, and agri-business. Online and hybrid delivery models can address infrastructure constraints while building long-term market relationships.

Mining Services and Technology

Australia's Mining Equipment, Technology and Services (METS) sector earned \$114 billion globally in 2020. Approximately 40% of METS companies export to Africa, with one-third maintaining in-country offices. Africa's critical minerals potential, hosting 30% of global reserves, positions it as essential to global supply chains for the energy transition.

Opportunity: Mining technology transfer, environmental management consulting, community engagement advisory, and mine rehabilitation services. Australian companies' ESG credentials, recognised through the annual AAMEG Africa Awards, provide differentiation from competitors with less rigorous governance standards.

Renewable Energy

Approximately 600 million Africans lack access to electricity. Africa's renewable energy potential (solar and wind) is among the highest globally. The African Development Bank's infrastructure investments, including a US\$696 million guarantee for the Central Corridor

Standard Gauge Railway connecting Tanzania, Burundi and DRC, signal commitment to enabling infrastructure.

Opportunity: Distributed solar systems, battery storage solutions, grid-scale renewable projects, and energy access financing. Australian expertise in remote and distributed power systems has direct applicability to African contexts.

Agricultural Technology

Agribusiness is one of the AfCFTA's priority sectors for industrialisation. Africa faces significant food security challenges with 120 million people currently facing acute food insecurity. Agricultural productivity improvement through technology adoption represents both a commercial opportunity and development imperative.

Opportunity: Precision agriculture technology, water-efficient irrigation systems, livestock genetics, post-harvest storage solutions, and agricultural supply chain management. Australian drought-resistant farming techniques have obvious applicability across African climatic zones.

SECTION 5: THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA)

(Term of Reference 4)

5.1 Understanding AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063, the African Union's development framework. Signed in Kigali in 2018 and operational since January 2021, the AfCFTA aims to create a single market for goods and services across 54 African countries, covering a population of approximately 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion.

Current Status: As of February 2025, 48 countries have deposited instruments of ratification. Nineteen countries are actively trading under AfCFTA rules through the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), which has expanded from 7 to 39 participating countries. The GTI has been confirmed as successfully meeting its objectives, allowing trade under AfCFTA rules to commence for countries that have completed the initiative.

Key Mechanisms: The agreement provides for 90% tariff liberalisation over a 10-year period with a 5-year transition, plus an additional 7% for 'sensitive products.' Forty-five Provisional Schedules of Tariff Concessions have been submitted and verified. The agreed Rules of Origin currently cover 92.3% of all tariff lines, with outstanding items covering textiles, clothing, and automotive products.

5.2 Why AfCFTA Changes the Economics of Engaging Africa

Market Unification: For Australian businesses, Africa has historically presented as 54 fragmented markets, each requiring separate market entry strategies, regulatory navigation, and commercial relationships. AfCFTA fundamentally changes this calculus by creating a framework for continental market access from a single entry point. A business established in Ghana, for example, can potentially supply the Nigerian market under preferential terms rather than treating it as a separate export destination.

Intra-African Value Chains: AfCFTA enables the development of regional value chains that Australian businesses can participate in. Rather than exporting finished goods to individual African markets, Australian companies can contribute inputs, technology, and services to manufacturing operations that supply the broader continental market.

Standards Harmonisation: The agreement is driving harmonisation of technical standards, customs procedures, and regulatory requirements. This reduces the complexity and cost of market entry for foreign businesses willing to invest in understanding the emerging continental framework.

Scale Economics: The World Bank estimates that AfCFTA could increase Africa-wide real income by 7% and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035. Intra-African trade reached US\$192.2 billion in 2023, with a 3.2% increase demonstrating momentum. This growth trajectory creates expanding market opportunities for international partners positioned to engage.

5.3 How Australian Firms Could Leverage AfCFTA

Australia is not a direct party to the AfCFTA, but the June 2025 Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and the AfCFTA Secretariat creates a framework for engagement. The MOU identifies priority areas including capacity building on trade

facilitation, partnerships in financial services, education, agriculture, mining, renewable energy, and support for micro, small and medium enterprises.

Strategic Entry Points for Australian Business:

- **Hub-and-Spoke Model:** Establish operations in a strategically located African market (e.g., South Africa, Kenya, or Ghana) that can serve as a platform for regional expansion under AfCFTA preferences.
- **Value Chain Integration:** Supply inputs, technology, or services to African manufacturers serving the continental market, rather than competing directly with local producers.
- **Trade Facilitation Services:** Provide customs brokerage, logistics, standards certification, and compliance services that African businesses require to navigate AfCFTA implementation.
- **Partnership with AfCFTA Implementation:** Engage with AfCFTA Secretariat initiatives including the Pan-African Payments and Settlement System (PAPSS), continental monitoring mechanisms, and trade capacity building programs.

5.4 The Window for Strategic Positioning

AfCFTA implementation represents a time-limited opportunity for strategic positioning. Trade frameworks, technical standards, and commercial relationships are being established now. Countries and businesses engaged early in this process will shape the architecture; those entering later will need to adapt to frameworks designed by others.

- **Standards Influence:** Technical standards, regulatory frameworks, and commercial practices are being established through AfCFTA implementation. Countries actively engaged in capacity building have opportunities to influence these standards in ways that align with their domestic industries.
- **Relationship Capital:** Commercial relationships in Africa are relationship-intensive. Early entrants are building trust, local knowledge, and partnership networks that create durable competitive advantages.
- **Critical Minerals Access:** Africa hosts 30% of global mineral reserves critical to the energy transition. As AfCFTA enables continental value addition, countries with established relationships will have preferential access to processed materials rather than raw commodities.
- **Australia's Current Advantage:** The June 2025 MOU with the AfCFTA Secretariat provides Australia a framework for engagement. Converting this framework into concrete outcomes requires timely implementation.

SECTION 6: THE ROLE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

(Term of Reference 5)

6.1 Current Government Engagement

The Australian Government's Africa engagement has historically been characterised by strong mining-sector commercial focus, with opportunities for broader strategic coordination across trade, investment, and aid portfolios.

Positive Recent Developments:

- **AfCFTA MOU (June 2025):** The Memorandum of Understanding signed by Assistant Minister Thistlethwaite provides a formal framework for Australia-AfCFTA cooperation, including capacity building commitments and sectoral partnership priorities.
- **Australia Awards:** Continued support for scholarships, fellowships, and short courses for African professionals, creating alumni networks with long-term commercial value.
- **Africa Down Under:** Government support for the annual conference in Perth, including Ministerial participation highlighting Australia's Africa engagement.

Opportunities for Enhancement:

- **Trade Representation:** Current Austrade presence (three offices, one trade commissioner) could be expanded to better match the scale of Australian commercial engagement and emerging opportunities.
- **Economic Strategy:** A whole-of-government economic strategy for Africa engagement, similar to the Invested: Southeast Asia Economic Strategy, could provide coherent direction.
- **Diaspora Integration:** Formal mechanisms to integrate African-Australian expertise into trade policy development could enhance market intelligence and opportunity identification.

6.2 The Role of Diaspora Networks: A Practitioner Perspective

Through my work with SyncSkills supporting skilled migrants to translate their capabilities into Australian employment and business contexts, I have observed how diaspora networks already function as informal trade infrastructure connecting Australian and African markets. This section offers practitioner-grounded insights into how these networks could be formalised and scaled.

Current Diaspora Functions (Largely Informal):

- **Market Intelligence:** African-Australian professionals maintain current knowledge of regulatory changes, market conditions, and commercial opportunities in their countries of origin that is often more current and nuanced than formal intelligence sources.
- **Trust Brokerage:** In relationship-intensive African business environments, diaspora professionals serve as trust intermediaries, vouching for Australian partners and navigating cultural-commercial expectations.
- **Transaction Facilitation:** Diaspora networks enable early-stage commercial relationships, connecting Australian businesses with potential partners, customers, and suppliers.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Local knowledge held by diaspora professionals helps Australian businesses identify and navigate regulatory, political, and commercial risks.

Barriers to Formalisation:

- Absence of formal recognition mechanisms for diaspora trade expertise
- No pathway for diaspora professionals to access government trade support programs
- Skills recognition barriers that undervalue international experience
- Fragmented diaspora community organisation limiting collective voice

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to be actionable within existing institutional frameworks while addressing the opportunities identified in this submission. Each recommendation includes rationale, intended outcome, and responsible stakeholders.

Recommendation 1: Establish Dedicated Africa Trade Desks within Austrade

Rationale: Current Austrade resourcing could be better aligned with the scale of Australian commercial engagement (\$60 billion in investment) and emerging AfCFTA opportunities. Targeted expansion would improve opportunity identification and market entry support.

Proposed Action: Establish Africa Trade Desks within Austrade with sector specialists covering mining services, education, agri-tech, financial services, and renewable energy. Initial expansion should prioritise Nigeria (West Africa hub), Kenya (East Africa hub), and South Africa (Southern Africa hub) in addition to existing Ghana coverage.

Intended Outcome: Proactive opportunity identification, responsive market entry support, and strategic relationship building across priority African markets.

Responsible Stakeholders: Austrade (primary), DFAT, Treasury

Recommendation 2: Create a Diaspora Trade Advisory Council

Rationale: Approximately 496,000 African-born Australians possess market knowledge, language capabilities, and commercial networks that remain underutilised in trade policy. Formal integration of diaspora expertise would improve opportunity identification and reduce market entry risks.

Proposed Action: Establish an Africa Diaspora Trade Advisory Council under DFAT or Austrade auspices to provide market intelligence input to trade policy, identify commercial opportunities, facilitate business matching, and advise on diaspora-enabled trade pathways.

Intended Outcome: Institutionalised access to diaspora expertise for trade policy development; improved market intelligence; diaspora recognition as trade facilitators.

Responsible Stakeholders: DFAT (primary), Austrade, Department of Home Affairs

Recommendation 3: Develop an Africa SME Export Pathway Program

Rationale: The Invested: Southeast Asia Strategy includes dedicated SME support through Landing Pads and targeted programs. Similar support for Africa would enable export diversification for small and medium enterprises.

Proposed Action: Design and fund an Africa SME Export Pathway providing market research support, trade finance facilitation, in-market landing support, and regulatory navigation assistance for small and medium enterprises seeking African market entry.

Intended Outcome: Reduced barriers to African market entry for SMEs; export diversification beyond mining-dominated engagement.

Responsible Stakeholders: Austrade (primary), Export Finance Australia, state trade agencies

Recommendation 4: Expand Export Finance Australia's Africa Portfolio

Rationale: Trade finance gaps disadvantage Australian exporters relative to competitors with dedicated Africa financing facilities. The AfCFTA Secretariat has identified trade finance as critical to implementation success.

Proposed Action: Establish dedicated Africa trade finance facilities within Export Finance Australia, including supply chain finance for African market transactions, political risk insurance with Africa-appropriate pricing, and working capital support for market entry.

Intended Outcome: Improved trade finance access for Australian businesses engaging African markets; competitive positioning against better-financed competitors.

Responsible Stakeholders: Export Finance Australia (primary), Treasury

Recommendation 5: Implement Skills-for-Trade Diplomacy Initiatives

Rationale: Africa's demographic dividend (median age 19; 740 million additional working-age population by 2050) creates massive skills demand. Australian education and vocational training expertise can build commercial relationships that translate into broader trade flows.

Proposed Action: Expand Australia Awards Africa to include vocational training aligned with AfCFTA priority sectors. Develop offshore delivery partnerships between Australian TAFEs/universities and African institutions. Create pathways for skills training to commercial relationship development.

Intended Outcome: Long-term commercial relationship building; Australian standards adoption; alumni networks for trade facilitation.

Responsible Stakeholders: DFAT (primary), Department of Education, Austrade

Recommendation 6: Operationalise the AfCFTA MOU

Rationale: The June 2025 MOU provides a framework but requires implementation mechanisms to deliver practical outcomes. Timely implementation is important given the window for strategic positioning during AfCFTA's formative phase.

Proposed Action: Develop an implementation plan for the AfCFTA MOU with specific deliverables, timelines, and accountability mechanisms. Establish regular engagement between Austrade, DFAT, and the AfCFTA Secretariat. Fund the committed annual Australia Awards short course for African trade officials.

Intended Outcome: Concrete deliverables from MOU commitments; sustained engagement with AfCFTA implementation; influence in continental trade framework development.

Responsible Stakeholders: DFAT (primary), Austrade

Recommendation 7: Commission Africa-Specific Market Intelligence

Rationale: Perception risk and information asymmetry are significant barriers to Australian business engagement. Authoritative market intelligence could shift business sentiment and support informed decision-making.

Proposed Action: Commission and publish regular Africa market reports through Austrade, highlighting commercial success stories, sector opportunities, and risk-mitigation approaches. Integrate Africa market intelligence into Go Global Toolkit with country-specific guidance.

Intended Outcome: Improved business awareness of African opportunities; reduced perception barriers; evidence-based decision making.

Responsible Stakeholders: Austrade (primary)

CONCLUSION

Africa's economic trajectory, marked by demographic dynamism, resource wealth, and the transformative potential of AfCFTA, represents one of the most significant opportunities for Australian trade diversification. The foundations for deeper engagement exist: \$60 billion in mining investment, established commercial relationships, diaspora networks, and recent policy developments including the AfCFTA MOU.

Realising this potential requires deliberate action to address the structural gaps identified in this submission. Current approaches could be strengthened to better match the scale of existing Australian commercial presence and the opportunities created by AfCFTA implementation.

This submission has sought to bring a practitioner perspective to these questions, drawing on direct experience at the intersection of workforce capability, skilled migration, and diaspora economic engagement. The insights offered complement technical trade analysis with operational understanding of how policy translates into economic participation.

THE CASE FOR TIMELY ACTION

This inquiry represents a narrow window for Australia to reposition itself within Africa's emerging trade architecture.

AfCFTA is not a future possibility; it is operational now. Trade frameworks, technical standards, and commercial relationships are being established through implementation. Countries and businesses engaged early in this process will shape the architecture. Those entering later will adapt to frameworks designed by others.

The recommendations in this submission are designed to enable Australia to compete where it has genuine comparative advantage: quality over scale, governance over volume, expertise over subsidy. The question before the Committee is not whether Africa matters, but whether Australia will engage strategically while the opportunity remains.

I welcome the opportunity to provide additional evidence or clarification to the Committee as required.

KEY DATA SOURCES AND REFERENCES

Note: Statistics cited in this submission draw from the following sources. The Committee may wish to validate specific figures with primary sources, particularly where data collection methodologies may affect comparability.

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT): Trade statistics, country fact sheets, AfCFTA MOU
- Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade): Market intelligence, trade services information
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Population by country of birth, migration statistics
- African Development Bank: African Economic Outlook 2025, Macroeconomic Performance and Outlook reports
- World Bank: Africa's Pulse reports, Global Economic Prospects
- African Union: AfCFTA Secretariat publications, implementation updates
- tralac Trade Law Centre: AfCFTA legal texts and policy documents
- Boston University Global Development Policy Center: China-Africa Economic Bulletin 2024
- UNCTAD: World Investment Report, FDI statistics
- Australia-Africa Minerals and Energy Group (AAMEG): Industry data, member insights
- Lowy Institute: Analysis of Australia-Africa economic diplomacy
- African Impact in Australia: Working papers on Africans in Australia
- Department of Education: International education export statistics

END OF SUBMISSION