

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission by Paydirt Media to the Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with Africa

Paydirt Media is a leading resources news media organisation which publishes two internationally circulating magazines and organises six resources conferences, including the internationally renowned Africa Down Under (ADU), which will be in its 24th year in 2026.

Paydirt Media has built a reputation as a trusted publisher and conference organiser in the resources sector. Its high-quality, experienced team travel across the globe to identify the latest trends in publishing and events as well as to keep up to date on developments in the resources sector. Our ability to engage with all stakeholders across the sector is reinforced by the diverse backgrounds of our team. The Executive Chair of Paydirt Media is Bill Repard while the Editor is Dominic Piper; both are very well known and connected across the Australian African mining scene.

In respect of the Committee's terms of reference for this inquiry our submission will focus on three issues : the role of the Government in identifying new opportunities and assisting Australian companies to access existing and potential economic opportunities in Africa; identifying barriers and impediments to trade and investment; and the nature of Australia's trade and investment relations with the region.

The nature of Australia's trade and investment relations with Africa

Australia's two way goods and services trade with Africa was valued at \$12.7 billion in 2024. Trade and investment relations are dominated by a relatively few sectors including mining (and METS) agriculture and education.

Australian trade and investment statistics for Africa are not thoroughly verifiable and are subject to a degree of estimation. Nonetheless it is judged that around 170 ASX listed companies operate in Africa, (and many

more non ASX listed companies) primarily in the resources sector. Australian mining companies now invest an estimated \$60 billion in Africa, investment that benefits both Australia and African countries. While African countries will seek to develop their economies where opportunities present themselves, mining and related activity will remain a cornerstone of African economic development throughout the 21st century.

The role of the Government in identifying new opportunities and assisting Australian companies to access existing and potential opportunities in Africa.

Paydirt's perspectives on the role of government are not surprisingly informed by its own engagement with Africa and in particular its organisation for 24 years of the Africa Down Under Mining Conference (ADU).

From small beginnings ADU has grown to become the second largest mining conference in the world focused exclusively on Africa, after the annual Mining Indaba in Cape Town. ADU regularly attracts more than 20 African delegations most led at Ministerial or Senior Officials level. In the last three years Delegations from Botswana and Lesotho have been led at head of Government level. In 2025, Paydirt at the request of the Ambassador of Angola, also issued an invitation for the President of Angola to attend the Conference. In the end President Lourenco did not travel to Australia since it was not possible for him to be formally received in Canberra on the required date, if he was also to attend ADU.

The role and importance of the Conference in the development of Australian African relations has certainly been recognised over many years. The conference brings together African governments and the Australian mining community supported by Australian government engagement on several levels. Australian Heads of Mission in African will often accompany visiting Ministers, while Ministerial representation from Canberra will provide an appropriate political backstopping of the Conference, underwriting and indeed facilitating the networking and meetings which can result in significant practical outcomes.

Notwithstanding the strength of the Australian private sector mining engagement in Africa, continued Australian government support and engagement is vitally important. Australia's main competitors in Africa

often do have substantial government backing in what is recognised as a challenging operating environment.

African governments want mining to contribute to economic development more generally and are looking at government to government relations to be a facilitator of increased mining involvement. Australian mining companies in Africa have a well-deserved reputation for ethical dealing and sensitivity to environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters. When that is supported by Australian technical mining expertise and regulatory rigour, Australia becomes a very desirable partner for many African governments. These strengths enable Australia to make a very important strategic contribution, particularly in the critical minerals arena, where its role in developing Africa's critical mineral reserves along sustainable, equitable lines is increasingly important to ensuring greater resilience in global supply chains.

Australian technical assistance programs have also helped underwrite Australia mining engagement in Africa. Areas of focus have included mining skills development and mining governance, areas where Australia has expertise to share and where both African governments and business see opportunities for economic growth and development.

The growth in African demand for Australian education services generally has grown out of the Australian provision of vocational and technical training in the mining and METS sectors, a clear example of how Australian engagement and investment in the mining sector can lead to a deepening and widening of the Australian African commercial relationship. The evidence so far should encourage Australia to more actively use our mining and METS investment as a platform for wider economic engagement, encompassing such additional areas as infrastructure, energy and agribusiness.

Barriers and impediments to the growth in Australian African trade and investment.

We believe it important to acknowledge the role and achievements of the Australian government in promoting the growth of the trade and investment relationship with Africa, even as we point to the extent of the Australian government current foot-print in Africa as also being a barrier and an impediment to growth of the relationship.

There are 54 countries in Africa. The most generally accepted division between Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and North Africa allocates 49 countries to SSA and five to North Africa. The Australian Government has nine diplomatic missions in Africa, two (Egypt and Morocco) in North Africa, and seven (Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mauritius) in SSA. Fifteen African countries have Missions in Canberra.

Austrade has one Trade and Investment Commissioner for SSA based in Kenya, with an office in Ghana, while the General Manager for Middle East and Africa is based in Dubai. For the Kenya post the four Austrade priority countries as listed on the website are Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and Tanzania, while for Ghana the four specified countries are Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. That is eight countries out of the forty-nine.

The intensity of Australian engagement with Africa over time has also been influenced by a range of factors not specifically related to the trade and investment relationship. Australia's candidacy for the UN Security Council in 2013-2014 saw an intensification of the relationship with additional human and financial resources allocated to support efforts to acquire as many of the 54 African votes as possible. The completion of Australia's term on the Council and a change of government in Australia saw the level of engagement with Africa diminish. A proposal to establish a post in Francophone Africa was not implemented. The Africa Branch of DFAT was reduced from four Sections to two Sections, and the technical assistance program was wound back, inter alia resulting in a reduction in the training opportunities for Africans working in the mining sector.

There will obviously be various barriers to the growth in trade and investment including knowledge of the goods and services that Africa wants and needs from Australia, and knowledge about the goods and services Australia can source from Africa. Most obviously knowledge about Africa is gleaned from a focused exchange and interaction with the individual countries of Africa.

While it is understood that governments must manage budgets and scarce resources it is equally clear that growth is a positive change in the status quo, requires an intensification of engagement, which must inevitably have an impact on the resources required.

The recent highly successful visits to Australia and Africa Down Under by President Masisi of Botswana (2023) and Prime Minister Matekane of Lesotho (2025) should serve to highlight the potential for growth in Australia's trade and investment relationship with Africa. Neither of these visits were initiatives of the Australian government who nonetheless stepped in to support them. There are others interested in undertaking such high-level visits, but government needs to play a role in their facilitation and management. There are resource implications, but the benefits can be very significant. The two recent visits although to ADU had far broader objectives than just promotion of the countries' minerals prospectivity.

Australia has many strengths underpinning its engagement in the African mining scene. But as we have noted Australian companies working on the ground in Africa require continued Australian government support and engagement since Australia's main competitors have substantial government backing. The rise of Chinese influence in Africa, which has only grown as competition for critical minerals has intensified, has been driven by a strong commitment of human and financial resources. For Australia to grow its influence and its trade and investment relations requires a similar commitment.

Submitted by Paydirt Media Pty Ltd – 18 December 2025