

Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee

Answers to questions on notice

Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee
Inquiry: Inquiry into Opportunities for strengthening Australia's relations with the Republic of France
Hearing Date: 26 June 2020
Division/Agency: Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Topic: Additional written questions on notice
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The Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee asked:

1. Page 2 of your submission states that the balance of two-way trade between Australia and France within the agricultural, fisheries and forestry sector is heavily in France's favour:

a) Are there initiatives in place to increase Australian exports to France within this sector?

b) Does the presence of the Agriculture Counsellors in Brussels, Belgium and UK mentioned on page 3 of your submission assist with developing Australia's agricultural trade interests with France?

2. Your submission states on page 4 that the Department is supportive of seeking opportunities to further strengthen Australia's cooperation with France in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean region, particularly within the areas of sharing scientific research and innovation, using Hobart as the gateway to Antarctica for resupply and in pursuing shared strategic goals in the Antarctic Treaty system (ATS):

a) What sort of opportunities could assist in further strengthening Australia's cooperation with France in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean region?

b) In what ways would using Hobart as an Antarctic gateway for France deliver significant economic benefit to Australia?

3. On page 3 of your submission, it is stated that Australia could strengthen the relationship with France in further cooperation in the science and management of Australia's toothfish fisheries and in combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing:

a) How could Australia strengthen this relationship?

b) Are there any existing international organisations, such as the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (QUAD) mentioned on page 3 of your submission, that may be able to assist with furthering this objective?

Answer:

Question 1

- a) Australia's agricultural trade relationship with France will be strengthened by negotiating an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Australia and the European Union (EU). There has been good progress in negotiations since the launch in June 2018.

- b) The Department's Agriculture Counsellors play a key role in promoting Australia's agricultural interests, and helping our agricultural sector grow. Our agriculture counsellors in Brussels engage with their French and EU counterparts to advocate Australian trade interests in the French and EU markets. They work with our biosecurity, exports and trade and market access teams, and together, they improve and maintain market access for Australian agricultural exports.

The strong working relationships established by counsellors contributes to the Department's understanding of agricultural issues in the French and wider EU market. This improved understanding allows for informed engagement with the French government and industry on agricultural issues.

Question 2

- a) As noted in the Department's submission, Australia and France have a close cooperative relationship in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Region. We have strong shared priorities across science, environmental management, operations and governance of the region through the Antarctic Treaty system. However we recognise that there are always opportunities for enhancing our relationship. Potential areas for additional cooperation include:

- Undertaking more collaborative marine science in East Antarctica and the area of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA)
- Undertaking further personnel and information exchanges for our complementary 'million-year' ice core projects (be it in science, drill technology or traverse operations) and broader glaciology and Antarctic climate sciences
- Exploring enhanced cooperation in the management of our respective islands in the subantarctic (subject to appropriate management of challenges such as biosecurity)

- b) Hobart, Tasmania is one of five major 'gateway' cities to Antarctica (others being Cape Town, Christchurch, Punta Arenas and Ushuaia). After the Australian Antarctic Program, France's national Antarctic program (Institut Polaire Français Paul Emile Victor – IPEV) is the next biggest user of Hobart as an Antarctic gateway. If France were to cease using Hobart as their primary Antarctic gateway the impact to the Tasmanian economy would be significant.

The economic contribution to Tasmania of Hobart's status as an Antarctica gateway has been valued at \$185.9 million a year in a report commissioned by the Tasmanian Department of State Growth (*The Contribution of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Sector to the Tasmanian Economy 2017-18 report*, Wells Economic Analysis, November 2018). The report also found the Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector in Tasmania accounted for 855 full-time equivalent local jobs in 2017-18.

Question 3

- a) Australia and France already have an excellent relationship in the science and management of toothfish fisheries and combatting IUU fishing on the Kerguelen Plateau in our respective national waters. Australia should continue to monitor and assess the priority of Southern Ocean on water surveillance activities, noting the Government's recent commitment in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update to acquire an

ice-capable vessel capable of operating in the Southern Ocean. In addition, Australia could commit to Kerguelen Plateau-wide fisheries and ecosystem surveys and re-establishing our regular science and policy bilateral dialogues on fisheries and Southern Ocean to enhance our science and management cooperation.

- b) The shared Southern Ocean fisheries objectives of Australia and France are best achieved through the Antarctic Treaty system, in particular the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). Our primary area of joint cooperation in the Southern Ocean is in the Indian Ocean sector, and therefore not the focus of the QUAD.