

African Professionals of Australia Limited

Community | Empowerment | Impact



African Professionals of Australia Limited A.B.N. 21 147 889 389
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Website: www.apaaau.com

Cover Letter

Date: 17 December 2025

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
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Dear Committee Secretary,

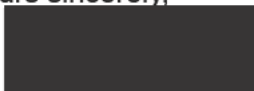
Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Strengthening Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with Africa

I would like to thank this committee for this opportunity to make this submission on behalf of the African Professionals of Australia (APA) VIC State Chapter as part of this inquiry into uplifting Australia's trading and investment ties with Africa. This submission focuses on high-demand and strategically aligned sectors across foreign affairs, defence, and trade that offer long-term, mutually beneficial outcomes for Australia and African partner countries.

The submission further outlines the unique and underutilised role that the Africa Professionals of Australia (APA), a national not-for-profit organisation representing skilled African-Australian professionals, with the mission to empower and support African Australian professionals, communities, and interest groups both in business and politics thrive by providing opportunities for networking, professional development, and collaboration at the national, regional and global level. APA can play a significant role in supporting sustained, high-impact engagement between Australia and African markets, institutions, and governments.

This report draws on peer-reviewed academic research, multilateral institution-based evidence, and official Australian and international sources. This report aims to help this Committee to find feasible and scalable pathways to enhance the engagement of Australia with Africa in accordance with Australia's national interests and Africa's future development vision.

Yours sincerely,



Precious Ishiguzor | Vice President

African Professionals of Australia VIC State Chapter



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Summary

Africa is one of the fastest-growing economic regions around the world and is expected to represent more than 25 per cent of the world population and a considerable portion of global consumption by the year 2050 (United Nations DESA, 2023). The level of engagement that Australia maintains with Africa, while long standing, is presently quite narrow and lacks strategic forethought and is mainly tied to extractive sectors.

This submission contends that Australia has a window of opportunity to re-calibrate its Africa strategy in order to prioritise sectors with strong demand and align with Australia's competitive advantages and Africa's development goals: critical minerals and energy transition, agri-food systems, defense capacity building, digital and cyber capabilities, infrastructure and logistics, education and skill building, and institutional governance.

Achieving enduring success is going to demand an ecosystem approach. Here, the Africa Professionals Australia (APA) organization could serve as a trusted intermediary in reducing information asymmetries, de-risk market entry, and support long-term management for people-to-people and institution-to-institution engagements.

1. Introduction

Australia-Africa relations are underpinned by complementary economic structures, shared interests in regional stability, and growing people-to-people links through migration, education, and professional exchange. Bilateral trade between Australia and Africa has been in excess of AUD 12 billion in recent years, with more than 170 Australian companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange operating in Africa, mainly in the mining and resource sector (DFAT, 2024).

Nevertheless, the Australian presence has not matched the structural change in Africa, such as the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA),

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the rapid pace of urbanization, the digital revolution, and the growing need for defence and security solutions (World Bank, 2023). Strategic competitors have outpaced Australia in forging long-term relationships and partnerships across infrastructure, defence, technology, or institutional capacity.

A more integrated Australia-Africa strategy is therefore required, one that aligns trade and investment with foreign policy and defence objectives while embedding long-term development and governance outcomes.

2. Australia-Africa Engagement: Trade, Defence and Strategic Foreign Affairs Alignment

2.1 Trade and Investment

Africa's combined GDP exceeds USD 3 trillion, with consumer and business demand expanding rapidly across energy, food, infrastructure, and services (AfDB, 2022). Australia holds competitive strengths in:

- Mining services, equipment and technology (METS), particularly in critical minerals essential to the global energy transition;
- Agri-technology, dry-land farming, and biosecurity systems;
- Infrastructure project development, regulation, and financing;
- Education, vocational training, and professional services.

The trade engagement, when strategically aligned, helps enhance supply-chain diversification for Australia and adds value and industry to Africa.

2.2 Defence and Security Cooperation

Africa is also facing rising security issues, including terrorism, maritime insecurity, cyber threats, and climate change-related instability (OECD, 2023). Australia's defence engagement can focus on:

- Development of Defence capability and professional military education;

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- Maritime security, including port security and stability of the Indian Ocean;
- Peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and cooperation on disaster relief;
- Cybersecurity and protection of critical infrastructure.

These collaborative efforts fit well with Australia's broader strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean.

2.3 Foreign Affairs and Regional Policy Alignment

Deeper engagement supports Australia's multilateral objectives, including rules-based trade, climate adaptation, and governance reform. The voting capacity of Africa and the growing diplomatic weight of the continent make engagement strategically important (Lowy Institute, 2024).

3. Current Barriers to Australia-Africa Engagement

Research consistently identifies several structural barriers:

- Limited diplomatic and institutional presence**, which hinders relationship development (DFAT, 2024).
- Perceived political and regulatory risk**, despite significant variation across African economies (World Bank, 2023).
- Information asymmetries and capability gaps**, particularly for SMEs seeking market entry (OECD, 2023).
- Over-concentration in extractive sectors**, limiting diversification and integration in the value-chain.
- Under-utilisation of diaspora expertise**, despite evidence that diaspora networks significantly improve trade and investment outcomes (Kerr, 2018).

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4. Opportunities for Enhanced Cooperation

4.1 Critical Minerals and Energy Transition

Africa has a significant reserve of cobalt, lithium, manganese, and rare earths for clean energy technologies (IEA, 2021). Australia can partner in the:

- Development of Governance processes in Ethical and transparent mining;
- Downstream processing and skills transfer;
- Development of the value-chain in battery manufacturing.

4.2 Agriculture and Food Security

Australia's expertise in climate-resilient agriculture aligns with Africa's need to increase productivity and resilience for their food systems (FAO, 2022).

4.3 Defence, Cyber and Capability Cooperation

Joint training, cyber resilience programs, and collaboration in the defence sector to support mutual security outcomes and regional stability.

4.4 Education, Skills and Institutional Capacity

Education partnerships yield soft power gains in the long run, making partnerships for trade, security, and governance possible (UNESCO, 2022).

5. The Strategic Role of Africa Professionals of Australia (APA)

APA is a representation of skilled African-Australian professionals across engineering, defence, ICT, finance, health, academia, and public administration. Research shows that diaspora organisations reduce transaction costs, improve institutional trust, and accelerate bilateral cooperation (Newland & Plaza, 2013).

APA can support this agenda by:

- Acting as a **trusted knowledge bridge** between Australian institutions and African markets;

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- Supporting **trade missions, defence exchanges, and skills partnerships**;
- Advising on **cultural, regulatory, and governance risk mitigation**;
- Building **long-term people-to-people and professional networks**;
- Supporting **monitoring, evaluation, and continuity** beyond electoral and policy cycles.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Australia's diplomatic representation and trade presence in key Africa markets.
2. Develop an integrated Australia-Africa strategy that connects trade, defense, and foreign policy issues.
3. Prioritise high-demand sectors, such as, critical minerals, agri-tech, defence cooperation, digital infrastructure, and education.
4. Formally engage diaspora organisations, such as APA, as delivery partners.
5. Support long-term institutional partnerships rather than short-term transactional engagement.
6. Align engagement with AfCFTA frameworks to maximise regional impact.

Conclusion

Africa's economic and strategic trajectory will significantly shape global trade, security, and governance outcomes over coming decades. Australia is well positioned to be a trusted, long-term partner, but this will require a shift from periodic engagement to sustained, institution-building cooperation.

Leveraging Australia's strengths, aligning trade with defence and foreign policy objectives, and systematically engaging the African-Australian professional diaspora, particularly through organisations such as APA, will materially strengthen Australia's national interest while supporting Africa's long-term development and stability.

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