



Executive Cover Letter

To: Chair, Trade Subcommittee

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament of Australia

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

Dear Chair,

On behalf of the Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA), I am pleased to submit this written submission to the Trade Subcommittee's inquiry into strengthening Australia's trade and investment relations with Africa.

OACWA is the peak umbrella body representing the 54 African countries in Western Australia. As a peak body OACWA works closely with the African community associations in Western Australia at all levels. We work at the intersection of community development, policy advocacy, and economic participation, and maintain extensive networks across African diaspora communities, professionals, entrepreneurs, and institutions both in Australia and across the African continent.

This submission draws on recent Australian Research Council funded research examining the demographic, economic, and legal dimensions of African migration to Australia, alongside OACWA's position paper on Australia Africa business engagement beyond the mining sector delivered during Africa down under conference 2025. Together, this evidence highlights that African-Australians represent a significant, yet under-utilised, national asset for diversifying and strengthening Australia's economic engagement with Africa.

We submit that future Australia Africa trade and investment strategies will be most effective where they move beyond a narrow sectoral focus, recognise Africa's diversity of markets, and deliberately engage diaspora communities as trusted partners in market access, risk mitigation, and relationship building.

OACWA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and would be pleased to provide further information or appear before the Committee should this be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Casty Nyaga Hughes, CPA
OACWA Executive President

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Trade Subcommittee Inquiry: Strengthening Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with Africa

Submitted by: Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA)

Submission date: 19/12/2025

Executive Summary

The Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Trade Subcommittee's inquiry into strengthening Australia's trade and investment relations with Africa. As the peak umbrella body representing African communities in Western Australia, OACWA provides a diaspora-informed perspective that complements government, industry, and academic inputs.

Australia's trade engagement with Africa has historically been concentrated in mining and extractive industries. While these sectors remain important, this focus does not reflect the breadth of opportunities across Africa's 54 diverse economies, nor does it leverage the capabilities of Australia's African diaspora. Africa is experiencing rapid population growth, urbanisation, and middle-class expansion, supported by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which is reshaping regional and global trade.

Drawing on Australian Research Council funded research and OACWA's own policy work, this submission argues that African-Australians are a strategic national asset. With enabling policy settings, diaspora communities can support diversification of Australia–Africa trade into sectors such as agribusiness, education, professional services, technology, renewable energy, health, and the creative industries.

OACWA recommends a coordinated, whole-of-government approach that recognises diaspora capability, expands Australia's economic treaty footprint in Africa, addresses legal and regulatory barriers, and aligns engagement with AfCFTA-enabled opportunities.

1. About OACWA

The Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA) is the peak representative body for African communities in Western Australia. OACWA represents a diverse membership spanning multiple African nationalities, cultures, languages, and professional backgrounds.

OACWA's mandate includes:

- Advocacy and policy engagement on issues affecting African Australian communities
- Supporting economic participation, entrepreneurship, and skills development
- Facilitating partnerships between government, industry, and community organisations
- Promoting social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding

Given Western Australia's strong trade orientation and its disproportionate share of Australia's African-born population, OACWA is uniquely positioned to contribute to discussions on Australia–Africa trade and investment from both a community and economic development perspective.

2. Context: Australia–Africa Trade and Investment Relations

Australia's two-way trade with Africa was valued at approximately \$12.7 billion in 2024 and has historically been driven by mining, extractives, and mining-related services. While these sectors remain important, this pattern of engagement does not fully align with Africa's own strategic economic vision or the direction of its trade and industrial policy.

Africa's Continental Vision and Trade Strategy

The African Union (AU) has articulated a clear long-term economic and trade vision through **Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want**, which sets out Africa's aspiration for inclusive growth, sustainable development, and deeper integration into global value chains. Central to Agenda 2063 is the objective of transforming Africa from a commodity-exporting continent into one that is industrialised, diversified, and competitive in higher-value goods and services.

A flagship initiative under Agenda 2063 is the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**, which establishes a single African market for goods and services covering 55 countries and approximately 1.4 billion people. AfCFTA aims to progressively eliminate tariffs on most goods, reduce non-tariff barriers, and harmonise trade rules to stimulate intra-African trade, industrialisation, and cross-border value chains.

The AU's trade agenda places strong emphasis on:

- **Trade diversification beyond raw commodities**
- **Value addition and industrial development** within Africa
- **Private sector-led growth**, including SMEs and diaspora-linked enterprises
- **Integration into global and regional value chains**, not solely bilateral trade

Africa's Trade with Other Regions

Africa maintains extensive trade relationships with other continents, particularly Europe, North America, and Asia. These relationships increasingly prioritise:

- Manufacturing and processed goods
- Agribusiness and food systems
- Energy transition and critical minerals
- Services, digital trade, and technology partnerships

Major external trade frameworks, such as preferential access arrangements with the United States and strategic partnerships with the European Union, are now being recalibrated to align with AfCFTA, reflecting Africa's desire to engage external partners on a more equal, continent-wide basis rather than through fragmented bilateral arrangements.

Implications for Australia

Australia's current Africa engagement, which is largely bilateral and resource-focused, does not fully leverage continental trade frameworks. Aligning Australia's trade and investment strategy with Africa's priorities under Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA would enable broader market access, participation in emerging value chains, and stronger SME engagement.

Why AfCFTA Matters for Australian Businesses

- **Single Market Access:** AfCFTA creates a rules-based market of approximately **1.4 billion consumers**, allowing Australian firms to engage regionally rather than country-by-country.
- **Reduced Trade Frictions:** Progressive tariff reductions and harmonised trade rules lower entry costs and improve predictability for exporters and investors.
- **Value Chain Participation:** AfCFTA is catalysing regional value chains in agribusiness, manufacturing, services, and digital trade areas aligned with Australia's strengths.
- **SME Enablement:** Continental frameworks favour scalable market entry models that benefit Australian SMEs, particularly when partnered with diaspora-led firms.

- **Strategic Alignment:** Engagement aligned to AfCFTA positions Australia as a long-term partner consistent with Africa's industrialisation and diversification agenda.

3. The African Diaspora in Australia as an Economic Asset

Australia hosts one of the largest African diasporas outside the African continent. As documented in *Africans in Australia: A Population Overview* (Working Paper No. 1/2023), at the 2021 Census there were approximately **496,000 African-born people living in Australia**, representing **1.9% of the total population**, with a further **326,000 second-generation Australians** having at least one African-born parent. The paper notes that "*Australia hosts the 12th largest community of African migrants outside of the African continent*" and that African migration has increased significantly since 2000, with *68.5% of African-born residents arriving after that year*.

The working paper further highlights that African migrants are predominantly of working age and are highly educated relative to the Australian-born population. Migrants from West, Southern and North Africa, in particular, show "*a higher prevalence of tertiary-level qualifications than all other overseas migrants in Australia and the Australian-born population*" (Working Paper 1/2023). This demographic and skills profile positions African-Australians as a significant but under-recognised economic asset.

Importantly, the research emphasises that African migrants' economic contributions extend beyond wage labour to entrepreneurship, business ownership, and transnational economic engagement. While outcomes vary by region of origin, the paper concludes that "*most African migrants fare better than the Australian-born population on key socio-economic measures*", underscoring their potential to contribute to trade, investment, and innovation if enabling policy settings are in place.

Building on this demographic evidence, *Unlocking the Economic Potential of Africans in Australia: A Legal Perspective* (Working Paper No. 2/2025) argues that Africans in Australia possess substantial capacity to support and diversify Australia–Africa trade. The paper finds that "*the population of Africans in Australia is growing and with that comes opportunity to increase and diversify trade and investment relations between Australia and Africa, which today is heavily concentrated in the mining and extractive sector.*" However, it cautions that this potential is not fully realised due to legal and policy constraints.

Together, these working papers demonstrate that African-Australians constitute a skilled, entrepreneurial, and globally connected population whose economic agency if properly supported can act as a bridge between Australian businesses and Africa's diverse markets.

4. Beyond Mining: Opportunities for Trade Diversification

OACWA supports the Committee's recognition that Africa is not a single market and that trade diversification must be tailored to specific countries and sectors. Based on diaspora networks, professional expertise, and community-linked business activity, the following sectors present strong potential for Australia–Africa engagement beyond mining:

- **Agribusiness and food systems:** value-added agriculture, compliant supply chains, and climate-resilient food production.
- **Education and skills:** transnational education partnerships, vocational training, and professional mobility.
- **Professional and business services:** legal, accounting, engineering, governance, and advisory services.
- **Technology and innovation:** fintech, edtech, health technology, and digital public infrastructure.
- **Renewable energy and sustainability:** solar, off-grid energy, water management, and climate adaptation.
- **Creative and cultural industries:** film, music, fashion, and heritage-linked tourism.

These sectors align with Africa's demographic and economic trajectory and Australia's comparative advantages in services, regulation, and skills. This position is further supported by a policy paper presented by OACWA during the 2025 Africa Down Under (ADU) Week, titled "**Australia–Africa Business Connections: Beyond Mining.**"

5. Barriers and Impediments to Trade and Investment

Evidence from *Unlocking the Economic Potential of Africans in Australia: A Legal Perspective* (Working Paper No. 2/2025) demonstrates that existing legal, regulatory, and treaty settings materially constrain African-Australian participation in trade and investment between Australia and Africa, particularly in agriculture and agribusiness trade.

5.1 Absence of Double Taxation Agreements (DTAs)

Working Paper No. 2 identifies the lack of international economic treaties as a critical structural barrier. It notes that "*Australia has no single investment and trade agreement or double taxation agreement with most African countries,*" with South Africa being the sole exception. The paper emphasises that the absence of DTAs exposes African-Australians engaged in transnational business to **double taxation**, significantly increasing cost, risk, and uncertainty.

For African-Australian entrepreneurs operating across Australia and African markets, this creates a clear disincentive to formalise trade and investment activities. The

working paper concludes that this lack of treaty protection “*most likely limits trade and investment relations*” and undermines Australia’s stated objective of encouraging migrant economic contribution under the Migration Act 1958 (Cth).

5.2 Agricultural Trade and Import–Export Constraints

The working paper further highlights how Australian domestic laws regulating imports can disproportionately restrict Africa-Australia agricultural trade. It observes that “*Australian domestic laws on imports may discriminate against African countries*”, particularly in relation to fresh agricultural produce.

A detailed case study in the paper illustrates how biosecurity regulations prohibit the import of fresh yams from African countries, while permitting similar imports from Pacific nations subject to treatment. The author argues that this effectively excludes African producers and diaspora-led businesses from participating in viable agricultural import–export markets, despite strong demand and established supply capacity in Africa.

These restrictions are especially significant given that:

- Agriculture remains a major employer and export sector across Africa
- African-Australians possess cultural knowledge, supply-side relationships, and market access advantages in agricultural trade
- Value-added and compliant agricultural imports align with both AfCFTA objectives and Australia’s multicultural market demand

The paper concludes that while biosecurity concerns are legitimate, **blanket prohibitions rather than risk-managed access** unnecessarily constrain trade and economic agency.

5.3 Impact on African-Australian Economic Capability

Taken together, the absence of DTAs and restrictive agricultural import frameworks have a compounding effect. They:

- Disqualify otherwise capable African-Australian entrepreneurs from scaling businesses
- Push trade into informal or sub-optimal channels
- Undermine Australia’s ability to leverage diaspora-led agribusiness as a bridge into African markets

As Working Paper No. 2 makes clear, laws and policies that “*place intentional or unintentional limitations on the capacity of migrants to contribute to the Australian economy are inconsistent with the national interest*”

6. The Role of Government

Both working papers underscore the central role of government in shaping the economic agency of African Australians and, by extension, Australia's trade and investment relations with Africa.

Working Paper No. 2/2025 situates this issue squarely within Australia's national interest, noting that the Migration Act 1958 (Cth) identifies as its object "*to regulate, in the national interest, the coming into, and presence in, Australia of non-citizens.*" The paper argues that laws and policies that unnecessarily limit migrants' economic participation are "*inconsistent with the national interest objective*" of the Act and therefore warrant reconsideration.

The paper concludes that Australian law should be used consciously as an enabling tool, stating that "*law is a powerful tool for economic agency*" and that it can and should be leveraged to unlock greater trade and investment engagement between Australia and Africa for mutual benefit.

Working Paper No. 1/2023 reinforces this position by demonstrating that African migration to Australia has increased "*significantly in volume, diversity and complexity*" and that the strength of social, economic, and professional networks linking Australia and Africa is now greater than ever. The paper echoes Professor Graeme Hugo's conclusion that there is "*a need to investigate in more detail the implications and impacts of this movement... on their communities and countries of origin and destination.*"

Taken together, this evidence supports a more proactive government role in:

- Integrating diaspora expertise into trade and investment policy
- Reducing legal and regulatory barriers to transnational business activity
- Aligning Australia's Africa engagement with contemporary demographic and economic realities

7. Recommendations

OACWA recommends that the Australian Government:

1. **Prioritise the negotiation of Double Taxation Agreements (DTAs) with key African economies**, to remove structural disincentives to diaspora-led trade and investment and improve certainty for Australian businesses operating across both jurisdictions.
2. **Review agricultural import and biosecurity frameworks affecting African produce**, with a view to enabling risk-managed access for fresh and value-added agricultural products consistent with treatment regimes applied to other regions.
3. **Adopt an AfCFTA-aligned Africa engagement strategy** that leverages African-Australian agribusiness capability, supports regional value chains, and enables Australian SMEs to engage in agriculture, food systems, and related services across African markets.
4. **Commit to a diversified Australia–Africa engagement strategy** that moves beyond mining and is grounded in innovation, trade diversification, and structured engagement with African diaspora communities.

8. Conclusion

Africa's economic transformation presents a significant opportunity for Australia to diversify its trade and investment relationships in a manner that is mutually beneficial, future-focused, and aligned with global economic trends. Evidence from ARC-funded research demonstrates that African Australians constitute a young, highly skilled, and globally connected population whose economic agency is currently underutilised.

As *Africans in Australia: A Population Overview* (Working Paper No. 1/2023) makes clear, the scale, skills, and demographic profile of the African diaspora position it as a strategic asset for Australia's future engagement with Africa. At the same time, *Unlocking the Economic Potential of Africans in Australia: A Legal Perspective* (Working Paper No. 2/2025) demonstrates that targeted legal and policy reforms are required to remove structural barriers and enable this potential to be realised.

By moving beyond a narrow focus on mining and adopting a diversified, diaspora-informed approach supported by enabling legal frameworks and strategic government leadership Australia can strengthen its economic and diplomatic engagement with Africa while advancing the national interest.

OACWA welcomes further engagement with the Committee and stands ready to contribute to ongoing policy development and dialogue.

References and Evidence Base

- Dagbanja, D. N. (2025). *Unlocking the Economic Potential of Africans in Australia: A Legal Perspective*. Africans Impact in Australia Working Paper No. 2/2025. ARC Discovery Project (220101642).
- Prout Quicke, S. (2023). *Africans in Australia: A Population Overview*. Africans Impact in Australia Working Paper No. 1/2023. ARC Discovery Project (220101642).
- Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA). (2025). *Australia–Africa Business Connections: Beyond Mining*. Africa Down Under Conference presentation, 6 September 2025.

Contact:

Organisation of African Communities in Western Australia (OACWA)
11 Lemana Court, Nollamara, Perth, WA 6061

Contact Person: Racine Iradukunda

Position: OACWA Program Coordinator

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]