

# Remarks at Business Leaders Reception

## – APEC

### **PRIME MINISTER:**

Thank you very much Craig. His Excellency Ngoc Anh, Minister for Science and Technology, representing the Prime Minister, Steven Ciobo, our Trade Minister, provincial leaders, Vice Ministers, ladies and gentlemen.

We all understand the extraordinary economic progress that has been made in Vietnam.

Over the last 30 years Vietnam has developed into a dynamic, middle-income country with one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

It's projected to become one of the world's 20 largest economies within the next 30 years.

This economic success has not been the result of an accident or luck.

It has been the result of deep structural reform and a decision by leaders like the Minister here and his colleagues to open up the economy to international trade and investment.

Now, those are not easy reforms anywhere and I want to commend the Vietnamese leadership for their sustained commitment.

Vietnam's hosting of APEC 2017 is a great opportunity to share this economic success story.

To demonstrate the power of free trade and opening up to the global economy and help to counter the often very vocal advocates of protectionism.

In 2018, Australia and Vietnam will celebrate our 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Over this period, our economic futures have become increasingly entwined.

We are important economic partners and our people-to-people links continue to grow.

The number of Australian companies here tonight with an interest in Vietnam, is ample testament to that and businesses from all economies play a very active role in influencing APEC's agenda.

And of course we must recognise too, that Australia, the most successful multicultural society in the world – well, I can claim that, I am biased, I'm the Prime Minister, but it is true, I'll state the case for that – but there are 300,000 Australians of Vietnamese origin. That represents one of the great strengths in the relationship.

The diversity of our Australian community, its multicultural nature, is one of our greatest assets. We are very proud of our resources, Minister, all of the iron ore and coal and other precious things under the ground, but our best assets – like yours – are the people walking on top of the ground rather than what might be found under it.

As I said in my speech in Perth last weekend, prosperity is a choice; open markets do not happen by themselves. They are choices we must make together.

So we will continue to work together, not just to deepen our bilateral relationship, but also to progress further the economic integration in our region, through forums like APEC and trade agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership.

The TPP creates rules of the road to match the new economic world in which we're living. It aims at old hidden trade barriers like corruption and new ones like data protectionism. It works to level the playing field for non-state companies and is designed to defend and extend the freedom to explore, share and capitalise on new ideas. Minister, I was delighted when I came in and you introduced me to a line-up of Vietnamese innovators. It's good to see that you're as passionate about innovation as we are in Australia.

Now over the same period, our economic relationship with Vietnam has experienced a transformation. It's no longer a donor-recipient aid relationship, it's a true economic partnership. Vietnam's middle class is expected to reach 33 million people by 2020 and Australian businesses are already seeing the benefits of that transformation.

Our universities have become a top choice for Vietnamese students, there are more than 20,000 Vietnamese students studying in Australia. Vietnam is the fourth biggest source country for international students for Australia.

Vietnam is our sixth largest market for agricultural products.

Vietnamese consumers are placing increasing importance on fresh and safe food and Australian farmers have a reputation for delivering just that.

More than 75 per cent of the bread used for Vietnam's signature dish banh mi, for example, comes from Australian wheat. So, a taste of Australia every day in traditional Vietnamese food.

[Laughter]

And of course, trade goes two ways. Vietnam is also benefitting from our growing trade relationship with Vietnamese dragon fruit, lychees and mangoes now readily available to Australian consumers.

The important thing to remember though is that the economic relationship goes beyond simply the trade of physical goods. We're laying the foundations for long-term economic growth and the days of relying purely on injections of labour and capital for growth, are behind us.

We need to drive productivity by sharing new ideas and new technologies.

Our innovation partnership is helping Vietnam and Australia prepare for this future.

We're helping Vietnam deliver new forecasting methods to understand the influence of regional mega-trends on its economy and society, drawing on the research of Australia's world leading scientific organisation, the CSIRO.

Our universities are equipping Vietnamese students with the skills and experience to compete in the 21st century economy, building relationships through collaborative centres such as RMIT Vietnam's new Centre of Digital Excellence.

We'll also help strengthen connections between industry and research organisations in Australia and Vietnam to ensure that research is relevant and can be transferred quickly from the laboratory to farms or the factory floor. A great example is the collaboration between CSIRO and Viet UC Seafood who are both here tonight.

CSIRO have supported Viet UC with new feed technologies, helping Viet UC sell bigger and higher quality prawns. I think we're all in favour of that.

[Laughter]

In fact with Christmas coming, the price of prawns is rising. It's one of the few things politicians don't get blamed for, the rising price of prawns, at least in Australia, perhaps they do in Vietnam.

Anyway, the important thing is that our futures are linked. They depend on free trade. They depend on investment. They depend on innovation. They depend on us working together and as we know, they depend on strong regional security and stability, issues that are more a matter for the East Asia Summit than for APEC, which is an economic conference. But it's wonderful to be here. I want to congratulate you on the enterprise and initiative you're showing as we continue to build and build upon an already strong Australian and Vietnamese economic relationship.

But above all, that relationship is built on people; all of us here and hundreds of thousands of others.

It will continue to deliver as long as we are committed to free trade, investment, open markets; allowing people to use their enterprise and initiative to get ahead and bring us all ahead as our economies grow together.

[Applause]

**[ENDS]**