

**FED:France warms to Australia-EU trade deal**

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SYDNEY, May 2 AAP - France will support formal talks on a free trade deal between Australia and the European Union after it found "solutions to the concerns" it had on agriculture.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday met with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in Sydney and publicly committed to supporting the start of negotiations - potentially within weeks.

"We are not wasting any time. We're not lagging behind," Mr Macron told reporters through a translator.

"Precisely because we have found the means and the solutions to the concerns we may have had, and we have a strong commitment with Australia."

France's agricultural lobby is particularly powerful, meaning Australian farming products have long faced high tariffs into the EU.

"We will keep close eye on interests in the agricultural field and interests of our territories in the Pacific and the climate issue, but I have no doubt that we can find a mutually beneficial agreement," Mr Macron said.

Mr Turnbull last week visited Europe, where he made his case for a free trade deal with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

The European leaders both supported the push for a deal, in part to promote free trade in the face of rising protectionism in the United States and China.

"This is also our vision of global trade which has to be free and fair, and I can say that both our countries do not consider trade war or tensions to be something in our interests," Mr Macron said.

Mr Turnbull said trade between Australia and France was worth \$9 billion in 2016/17.

"We both understand that free trade and open markets are good for jobs. Good for jobs in France, good for jobs in Australia," he told reporters.

The two countries have set up a ministerial dialogue on trade and investment to deepen economic connections.

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