

SE EARLY GENERAL NEWS
HD **Robb tackles a \$1.2 trillion challenge**
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WHEN Tony Abbott declared Australia open for **business** during his euphoric election night victory speech last year, he was foreshadowing a not-so-subtle challenge for one of his key Cabinet members, Andrew Robb.

Within a few short months, the Trade and Investment Minister would be lunching in Singapore with six potential investors managing \$1.2 trillion dollars between them in sovereign wealth funds.

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But with only one of them investing \$200 **billion** in Australia, his challenge is selling the nation's **business** strengths and opportunities, to attract the other \$1 trillion locally, including injecting foreign funds to grow Australian agriculture and agribusiness.

In Opposition, Mr Robb carried a heavy workload as the Shadow Finance Minister and chairman of the Coalition's policy development committee, where his diligent work ethic combined with effective stakeholder consultation, was highly rated.

At one stage, Julie Bishop lobbied to retain both of her shadow portfolios in Trade and Foreign Affairs, should the Coalition win government, but that move failed to eventuate.

Ms Bishop was eventually appointed Foreign Affairs Minister in Mr Abbott's first ministry while Mr Robb was given the triple whammy of Trade, Investment and Tourism.

As the minister responsible for tourism, Mr Robb doesn't wear the official title of Tourism Minister but that portfolio has been moved into one of his agencies, Austrade, to support the new Government's focus on international tourism.

Understanding the weight of his key challenge to sell Australia's strengths to the world, the former National Farmers' Federation boss and Victorian Liberal MP has wasted no time making strong inroads and goes about his task without an assistant minister or parliamentary secretary.

Since the nation's 69th ministry was sworn in last September, he's attended 27 investment round table meetings in 10 different countries.

He spends two-thirds of his time abroad on government **business** and is often accompanied by farming and agribusiness leaders seeking opportunities to boost Australian food and fibre exports.

This month, he also participated in the 2014 APEC trade ministers' meeting in **China** and returned to Singapore for talks on the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement.

Mr Robb has been heavily involved in concluding Free Trade Agreements with Korea and Japan which have been largely applauded by the farm sector.

But there's still plenty of work ahead to conclude a historic trade deal with **China** by the year's end.

Speaking to Fairfax Agricultural Media, Mr Robb said to capture the future opportunities and advantages heading Australian agriculture's way, particularly in **China**, high quality exports were a prime focus of trade negotiations.

A key sales point, which is helping to relieve some of his work-load, is Australia's solid reputation for producing high-quality farm products.

"I'm travelling the region endlessly and the clean green healthy **brand** of Australia is gold," he said.

"If you go to Taiwan and places like that, they're demanding 'Aussie beef, Aussie beef' and if you go to Shanghai they also want Aussie beef. **Brand** Australia is so strong.

"The **Chinese** see the blue skies and the clean and healthy food here and the high end of their middle class this exploding middle class are prepared to pay for brands.

"You see them in all of the **brand** stores and the same is true for food.

"We're a high cost country and it's no different for our farmers.

"But if we get into those higher valued ends of the market, we'll get a return that'll warrant the cost structures we've got in Australia."

Mr Robb said concluding an FTA with **China** by the year's end would provide preferential access for Australian agriculture and yield greater export opportunity.

"I can see with the New Zealanders, they cut a deal with **China** four years ago and their **dairy** has increased in revenue by \$2.2 **billion** in that time, while our **dairy** revenue from **China** has increased by \$60 **million**," he said.

"We just have to be at the high value end of the market because there will be a lot of other competition at the mass end of the market.

"Take beef we **sold** 60,000 tonnes two years ago and 260,000 tonnes last year to **China**.

"They went from about 12th in our customer base to third in one year.

"It'll probably go up and down a bit because it's an immature market for us but any market that can jump into third for beef in one year tells you a much bigger story about the opportunities across the **board**."

Mr Robb says foreign capital is critical to his role and taking Australian businesses "to another level in all of the things we're good at and to stay in front".

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NS e512 : Physical Trade | e51 : Trade/External Payments | ecat : Economic News

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