

Australia's trade minister seeks end to trade curbs on visit to Beijing

Australia's Trade Minister arrived in Beijing on Thursday, where he will meet his Chinese counterpart, as Canberra pushes for the removal of all trade impediments and diplomatic relations stabilise.

Trade Minister Don Farrell said he would meet with China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao in Beijing and "be advocating strongly for the full resumption of unimpeded Australian exports to China – for all sectors – to the benefit of both countries and in the interests of Australian exporters and producers".

There had been good will on both sides but more needed to be done, he told reporters at Beijing's Capital Airport.

"Nothing is going to do more to achieve peace in our region than strong trading relationships between Australia and China," he said.

The pair would also chair a Joint Ministerial Economic Commission, a meeting first held in 1986, but suspended since 2017 when ties began to deteriorate over diplomatic disputes.

China is Australia's largest trading partner, with two-way trade in goods worth A\$287 billion (\$195 billion) in 2022 dominated by iron ore exports which China cannot easily replace. Yet an Australian trade minister has not visited China since 2019.

Australian wine, beef, barley, coal, seafood, and timber exports to China were hit by trade curbs in 2020, and an Australian journalist Cheng Lei was detained in Beijing on national security charges, after Australia called for an international inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, which angered Beijing.

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