



MEDIA RELEASE

Agribusiness Food Roundtable Helps Address Victorian Bilateral Challenges & Opportunities

Tuesday July 15, 2014. The Consulate General of Malaysia, Melbourne in collaboration with MATRADE and the Australia Malaysia Business Council (AMBC) Victoria recently co hosted a roundtable to discuss issues directly impacting agriculture, food and beverage exports between Victoria and Malaysia. In addition, another key objective of the event organisers was to provide a platform for the participants and observers to learn from each other, network and exchange experiences and ideas.

Acknowledging the importance of the roundtable, **Mr. James Flintoft**, Deputy Secretary Agriculture Group with the Victorian Dept of Environment & Primary Industries was joined by Second Secretary (Halal Attaché), Malaysian High Commission, **Mr. Mohd Asri Abdullah** and Deputy Director, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry of Malaysia, **Mr. Syariman Mat Salleh** who travelled from Canberra and Sydney respectively to participate in the event.

The agenda for the roundtable was developed to facilitate thought leadership discussion and the organisers sought the views from business and industry representatives on key issues and opportunities to enhance and support food and beverage exports between Victoria and Malaysia. The 10 roundtable participants were –

Mr. Mohd Asri Abdullah, Malaysian High Commission
Mr. Syariman Mat Salleh, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry of Malaysia (MOA)
Mr. James Flintoft, Department of Environment & Primary Industry (DEPI)
Mr. Peter Kulich, Shire of Baw Baw
Mr. Ben White, Royal Agricultural Society
Mr. Adam Moore, Bonkers Retail
Mr. Marshall Dwyer, Plenty Food Group
Mr. Peter Myers, Dairy Australia
Mr. Alexander Arbuthnot, Agribusiness Gippsland
Mr. Peter Lightfoot, Cedar Meats

A further 14 observers were in attendance and the program that was facilitated by AMBC Victoria's **Mr. Mike Anderson** ensured there was open discussion and participation by all attendees.

In his welcoming remarks, Malaysian Consul General to Victoria **Dato Dr Mohamad Rameez Yahaya** provided the attendees an insight into the Malaysian Government's Economic Transformation Program (ETP), the country's aspirations to lift productivity levels of the agriculture sector and ensure food security in the decades to come. He also emphasised the importance of the Malaysia Australia Free Trade Agreement (MAFTA) and need for win-win bilateral trade between Victoria and Malaysia.

AMBC Victoria President **Mr. Joe Perri** said the interest and enthusiasm of the participants in the inaugural roundtable had exceeded all the expectations of the business council, Consulate and MATRADE organisers.

MATRADE Director **Ms. Noor Hayati Abu Noh** also confirmed that discussions were well advanced for further collaborative sector specific roundtable events in the future with AMBC Victoria and the Consulate and she was confident that they would provide opportunities to build on the commercial advantages of MAFTA.

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Responding on behalf of DEPI, Mr. Flintoft outlined to the participants and observers details of the Victorian Government's Food to Asia Action Plan that was released earlier this year and range of considerations to be aware of when establishing or growing an export market to Malaysia as well as an understanding of the current export environment to the Asia Pacific region in general.

Mr. Mohd Asri Abdullah supported by Mr. Syariman Mat Salleh followed by providing an insight into Halal certification requirements and details of the various agencies that can assist Victorian exporters that wish to market their products to Malaysia's diverse population. It was pointed out that Halal Certification from a recognised agency, together with Victoria's clean, green and environmentally sustainable practices were welcome and recognised in the Malaysian marketplace.

Other topics discussed at the roundtable included future opportunities around MAFTA, the importance of market research and selection, understanding cultural differences, the role governments can play in facilitating exports, initiatives around supporting the future growth of the agribusiness sector, and many more.

A very interesting observation that was made by the participants related to Melbourne's global recognition as one of the world's most livable cities and this acknowledgement was a marketing advantage for Victorian exporters that included the accolade in their promotional activities.

As there was a significant depth of experience and understanding amongst the roundtable participants and observers, discussions and engagement continued well after the official program had concluded.

The Consul General, MATRADE and AMBC Victoria have confirmed that a report of the principle areas covered during the roundtable will be produced and distributed to the attendees, government and interested stakeholders.



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