Statement of the APEC Committee on Trade and Investment, together with the APEC Digital Economy Steering Group in support of the WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce¹

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is committed to facilitating the development of the internet and digital economy, including e-commerce and digital trade. APEC recognises the positive role that existing plurilateral negotiations can play², and supports progress of negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to deliver a trade and investment environment that is free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable, as set out in the Aotearoa Plan of Action. In 2022 and 2023, respective APEC member participants welcomed the substantial progress made to date on the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce³.

Acknowledging the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in highlighting the digital economy's importance, accelerating the digital transformation, bridging the digital divides, and heightening the need for global rules governing digital trade;

Emphasising the importance of the digital economy and global digital trade rules that pave the way towards the attainment of strong, balanced, secure, sustainable and inclusive growth;

Recognising that e-commerce offers unique opportunities as well as challenges for member economies and businesses of all sizes, including by lowering costs for businesses to access and participate in global markets;

Noting the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC)'s views on the importance of coherent global digital trade rules, and its recommendation for APEC economies to seek a permanent moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions at the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference, and to participate constructively in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce, with a view to conclude negotiations on digital trade rules this year⁴;

Reaffirming the urgency of upholding and further strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, including through the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and the positive role that existing plurilateral negotiations and discussions are playing in progressing outcomes;

¹ For certainty, this Statement is without prejudice to an APEC member economy's position vis-a-vis its participation in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-commerce

² 2021 APEC Ministerial Joint Statement

³ 2022 APEC Ministerial Joint Statement, 2023 APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Statement of the Chair

⁴ 2023 ABAC Statement on the WTO

Recognising the high level of current participation of APEC economies in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce and each participating APEC economy's position in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce;⁵

The APEC Committee on Trade and Investment, together with the Digital Economy Steering Group:

- congratulates participants in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce on the progress made to date
- encourages them to accelerate the negotiations and work toward an outcome that is balanced, inclusive and meaningful
- encourages more WTO members to participate in the initiative in order to further expand its benefits, taking into account the unique opportunities and challenges faced by Members, including developing members and LDCs, and to contribute to reinvigorating work under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, based on the mandate as set out in WT/L/274 and particularly in line with its development dimension
- encourages all WTO members to further intensify the discussions on the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions in the WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, including on its scope, definition, and impacts.

The respective APEC participants in the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce stand ready to provide all necessary support to work toward completion of these goals.

We encourage APEC member economies to develop and promote initiatives which build capacity for participation in the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce.

⁵ The current APEC member participants in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative of E-commerce are: Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Peru; the Philippines; the Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand and the United States of America.