

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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General Council

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1999 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Organization and Management of the Work Programme

Communication from Argentina, Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Hungary, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, Uruguay and Hong Kong, China

The following communication dated, 2 July 1999, has been received from the Permanent Mission of Australia.

Proposal

1. That Ministers launch at Seattle a round of multilateral trade negotiations aimed at the progressive liberalization of trade in goods and services and the improvement and, when agreed, further development of WTO rules in a way that achieves an overall balance of the interests of all Members. This round shall end no later than three years after it begins. The negotiations shall be launched, conducted and concluded in the form of a single undertaking. Ministers will meet half-way through the round to assess progress and at the end of the round to agree on the results. Between ministerial conferences, the General Council shall meet in special session to direct the negotiations.

Issues

2. Ministers agreed in May 1998 that the General Council would submit to them recommendations for decision on the scope, structure and time-frames of the WTO work programme to ensure that the work programme begins and concludes expeditiously. The scope, structure and time-frames will need to be fully reflected in a self-contained declaration.

3. The decisions that Ministers will take by consensus at Seattle will determine the scope of the work programme. Whatever the components of the WTO's negotiating programme, it should be in the form of a multilateral round as a single undertaking. This is to ensure a package that achieves an overall balance among the interests of all Members.

4. It will be important to maintain the confidence of the business community in the ability of the WTO to produce meaningful outcomes. The Seattle Ministerial could thus acknowledge the possibility of early results. A mid-term review of progress in the round could take decisions, if warranted, on whether any early results could be applied by Members provisionally until the conclusion of the round. Any early results shall be treated as part of a single undertaking.

5. It will be crucial to aim at concluding the negotiations within a short time-frame. Government, business and the wider community will not want to wait too long for outcomes, as was

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the case with the Uruguay Round. A three year time-frame seems sensible since, unlike the Uruguay Round, all the possible negotiating issues have already been dealt with extensively in the WTO.

6. A three-year time-frame suggests that clear, concise and explicit negotiating plans should be agreed at the Seattle Ministerial Conference. Work on negotiating plans should not be at the expense of the short amount of time available for the negotiations proper.

7. As far as the overall management of the WTO work programme is concerned, political supervision will be important. Thus the fourth Ministerial Conference provides an opportunity for Ministers to assess progress, give any necessary direction and to take any agreed early decisions. Intersessional supervision of the negotiations could be provided by the General Council meeting in special session.
