

PACER PLUS

OUTCOMES: TECHNICAL REGULATIONS

Unnecessarily complex and opaque regulatory processes impose significant costs that weigh especially heavily on small and medium-sized enterprises in Pacific island countries. PACER Plus aims to turn this around, especially for products and services of key relevance to Pacific island countries, ensuring that they can engage effectively with regional and global trading partners over the medium-to-long term.



Scope

PACER Plus includes provisions on standards and conformance. It also has a work program to support the progressive introduction of these elements, which is consistent with development levels and resourcing.

PACER Plus reaffirms existing rights and obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement, which apply to Pacific island country WTO Members (such as Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu). It also requires non-WTO Members (such as Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Tuvalu) to comply with those obligations to the extent of their capacity or as otherwise stipulated in the Agreement.

In bringing all members to the stage where they can – to the extent practicable – prepare and apply regulations, standards or procedures based on the WTO TBT Agreement, the Agreement takes into account:

- + the special development, financial and trade needs of developing members, including the requirement to prevent costs associated with implementing standards and conformity assessment procedures becoming obstacles to developing country exports, and
- + the need for substantial technical economic and technical cooperation between members on standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures.

In line with other modern FTAs, PACER Plus expands on the WTO TBT Agreement on transparency. The Agreement incorporates advanced features such as:

- + early publication of proposals to introduce new regulations and procedures,
- + early notification of when amendments can be made and comments taken into account on new regulations or procedures, and
- + early notification (in electronic form) to other members on proposed regulations or procedures to allow reasonable time for comments to be taken into account.



Standards and quality assurance and the Pacific island countries

PACER Plus can play a critical role on standards and conformance through capacity building at two levels. National bodies need to be strengthened in order to have a systemic impact across economies. This is a long-term, highly technical process that has important development implications.

At the sectoral level, stronger standards and conformance infrastructure will make a big difference in:

- + services, particularly tourism and industries like transport that cluster around tourism. Services contribute around two-thirds of gross national product in most Pacific island countries and account for a growing share of employment,
- + agriculture, fish, fish products, and forest products. Food products account for around 30 per cent of Pacific island country merchandise exports, and fish and fish products are among Pacific island countries' top merchandise exports. Applying relevant standards can help facilitate trade and access to global supply chains by ensuring the quality and safety of products to consumers, and
- + academic, professional and technical qualifications. Developing credible frameworks for recognising qualifications is a key to increasing regional labour mobility.



Capacity building

The members of PACER Plus have agreed to capacity building on technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures. This is on at least an equivalent scale to Australia's other FTAs, including the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA).

Under the PACER Plus Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme, members have agreed to:

- + support joint efforts in the fields of technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures
- + assist in promoting mutual understanding of one another's technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures, and
- + strengthen information exchange and cooperation among the participants.

While members will determine details once PACER Plus comes into effect, this work may include:

- + assistance in adopting and applying technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures
- + assistance in improving technical analysis, product testing and certification (including organic certification) of local products to ensure that they meet international standards, and
- + support for relevant central institutions in negotiating and implementing regulatory cooperation agreements with respect to technical regulations, standards and the results of conformity assessment procedures.