

The Australian Digital Edition: Mission to seize FTA deals in China

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EXCLUSIVE

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Australia is next week sending its biggest ever business delegation overseas — with the corporate chiefs heading to China to pursue the fresh opportunities opened up by the free-trade agreement that came into effect just three months ago.

More than 1000 businesspeople will fan out in the country to capitalise on new trade and investment deals enabled by the FTA and to meet Chinese counterparts.

The program, the second Australia Week in China showcase, features 150 events in 10 cities starting April 11, and culminates in Shanghai with a gala lunch event at which Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will deliver the keynote address.

He will then fly to Beijing to meet national leaders including his counterpart, Premier Li Keqiang, in his first visit as Prime Minister to the country, Australia's top trading partner.

The businesspeople on the delegation are mostly chief operating officers — who will focus on the nitty-gritty details of negotiating, completing and implementing deals — not high profile chief executives and chairmen who dominated the inaugural Australia Week in China, held two years ago, when the core aim was to demonstrate the united resolve of Australia Inc. to complete the FTA after 10 years of negotiation.

Steve Ciobo, the Trade and Investment Minister leading next week's delegation — which includes his predecessor Andrew Robb as trade envoy — told The Australian that its size “underscores the interest from Australian business to engage with China, its commitment to work with China”.

He said the delegation comprises a representative mix of the Australian economy, including many small and medium companies. It also includes the Premiers of Queensland, Anastacia Palaszczuk, and of Tasmania, Will Hodgman, and the Minister for Tourism and International Education, Richard Colbeck.

Another major event in Australia Week in China will be the annual Australia China Business Awards, which this year received the largest number of entries ever.

The awards will be announced and presented in Shanghai, hosted by the Australian Chamber of Commerce there on April 13.