

PECC TRADE FORUM RTA TASK FORCE
THE TASK FORCE WORK PROGRAMME IN 2003

Proposed Outputs

The RTA Task Force set itself a two-year work programme for 2002-3. It aims to complete this work programme by the time of the PECC General Meeting in September 2003. Two major outputs are envisaged:

- 1) A set of “RTA Principles”, setting out the conditions under which RTAs in the APEC region can be regarded as not only WTO-consistent but also consistent with APEC’s principles and objectives.
- 2) A comprehensive set of papers analysing the RTA developments in the Asia-Pacific region from a range of perspectives, forming the basis of at least one major publication intended to serve as a principal source of information and policy analysis on these developments.

Both outputs will be based on an extensive two-year (2002-3) work programme designed to thoroughly examine the Asia-Pacific RTA developments and the analytical, policy and strategic issues that they raise, with a view to reaching conclusions on their implications for the region and its constituent economies, APEC, the WTO and the multilateral trading system. This work programme builds on the initial progress made at the Trade Policy Forum seminar in Bangkok in June 1991.

Issues to be covered in Task Force Work Programme

An updated outline of the issues that need to be covered in the Task Force’s two-year work programme is attached. This develops further the outline prepared at the commencement of the programme, taking into account the lessons and conclusions drawn from the Task Force’s work in 2002. A separate annotated version of the outline is also attached, which summarises the progress made during 2002 and identifies the principal gaps that need to be filled in 2003. The 2003 work programme is designed to fill these remaining gaps and to draft and finalise the Task Force outputs.

Work Programme in 2003

The Task Force work programme in 2003 will be based around three planned meetings. The meetings with their tentative dates are Washington (22-23 April), Phuket, Thailand (25 May), and Brunei (30-31 August).

The Washington meeting will immediately precede meetings of the PECC Coordinating Group and Standing Committee. The Phuket meeting is planned as a joint effort with the

APEC Study Centre consortium, which is holding its annual meeting in Phuket on 26-27 May. The Brunei meeting immediately precedes the PECC General Meeting, to be held in Brunei in the opening days of September.

The Washington and Phuket meetings will consider papers and presentations designed to fill remaining gaps in the Task Force programme. The Brunei meeting will review and finalise the Task Force outputs.

The Washington meeting will be an opportunity to draw on expertise from multilateral institutions and other international organisations based in that city. A joint session with the IDB will also provide an opportunity for linkages with western hemisphere research networks working on RTA issues. The Phuket meeting will provide an opportunity to draw on related work being undertaken within the APEC Study Centre network, particularly by the APIAN group.

First drafts of programmes for the Washington and Phuket meetings are attached. These are tentative at this stage and comments and further suggestions are very welcome. It is recognised that the number of projected sessions exceeds the time available and that some pruning will be required, based on speaker availability and/or Task Force priorities. Individual task force members will be approached about contributing to these programmes and voluntary offers of contributions are also welcome.

Clearly, a large amount of work will have to be done between the Phuket and Brunei meetings, involving the editing and finalisation of papers for publication and the drafting and refinement of the proposed 'RTA Principles'. Modalities for drafting, reviewing and finalising the "Principles" will have to be agreed at the Washington and Phuket meetings.

Note that the Trade Forum meetings in Washington on 22 and 23 April will be followed by two further events, also in Washington:

- A major symposium on international trade and finance issues on 24 April, organised by USPECC to mark the launching of the new US Asia Pacific Council.
- A seminar on 25 April on comparative analysis of the US-Singapore and US-Chile FTAs, organised jointly by the Inter American Development Bank and the US Combined Chambers of Commerce

Additional Linkages

1. In addition to the efforts of its own members, the Task Force should obviously seek to draw on the work of other institutions and networks. For example:
 - The IDB has recently launched a major research programme on Rules of Origin, the first outputs of which are scheduled for May 2003. This may be very helpful to the Task Force in formulating approaches to this crucial but difficult issue

- The Institute for International Economics will hold a major conference in “Free Trade Agreement and US Trade Policy in Washington on 7-8 May.
- The Task Force should review recent extensive research outputs on RTAs by the World Bank, OECD and WTO Secretariat.

Task Force members are encouraged to pass on information regarding other research networks, projects, conferences and outputs that may be relevant to the Task Force’s work.

2. The PECC Finance Forum will hold a meeting in Hua Hin, Thailand on 9-10 July. Given that the Finance Forum is also working on aspects of regional economic integration, the possibility of a joint session between the two Forums at this meeting may be explored.
3. The Task Force is expected to contribute to a Trade Policy Dialogue on RTAs organised by the APEC CTI in Khon Kaen, Thailand on 28 May. PECC Secretariat has indicated that the Task Force may also be required to contribute to a dialogue with APEC officials and trade ministers immediately before the APEC Trade Ministers’ meeting on 2 June, also in Khon Kaen.
4. The Task Force’s work may be of interest to PBEC and ABAC. Soundings will be taken of possible interest by these two organisations in cooperation or collaboration with the Trade Forum.
5. The Task Force aims to foster linkages with other research networks working on RTAs. Task Force members recently participated in the Asian Development Forum in Seoul, and Task Force members were also invited as observers to recent meetings of NetAmericas, the research network on Trade in the Americas organised by the Organisation for American States, and the Regional Integration Network (RIN) organised by the IDB. Key members of each of the latter two networks also attended the recent Trade Forum seminar on RTAs in Vancouver. It is hoped that this reciprocal participation in meetings can be continued with a view to further development of these linkages and eventual collaboration. The joint meeting planned with the IDB in Washington is aimed to further develop linkages with western hemisphere research networks.

