



# Multilateral Partners Program – Opening Remarks

Opening remarks delivered by Deputy Commissioner Hector Thompson to the Multilateral Partners Program Workshop 2024.

**Last updated** 12 March 2024

Good morning,

On behalf of the Australian Taxation Office, I would like to welcome you to Australia, and to our Multilateral Partners Program here in sunny Brisbane.

As we gather in this beautiful city, I would like to first acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. We are on Turrbal and Jagera land and would like to pay my respects to their elders past and present. We will have a formal Welcome to country from Uncle Billy Cummings a little later today, and I expect he will tell you a little more.

It really is a great pleasure to be here in person to extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you. Of course, Brisbane will be hosting the 2032 Olympics and so you should make the most of the opportunity to do some early reconnaissance for when you return in eight years' time!

If it is your first-time visiting Brisbane, I hope you've taken the chance to get out and explore, maybe even spot a koala. Brisbane is where I first encountered a koala and I have many fond memories of that time, when my family came to Brisbane to kick off a trip around Australia before we moved here permanently. I've since learned that Brisbane is the birthplace of the Australian delicacy lamingtons, so hopefully you'll get to sample one while you're here as well.

I would also like to thank Assistant Commissioner, Belinda Darling, as well as Gabbi Jackson and her International Relations team, for pulling together what I expect to be a fantastic three days of learning, sharing and connection.

It is also pleasing to see that 12 member countries of Study Group on Asia-Pacific Tax Administration and Research (SGATAR) have joined us. It's fitting we should hold this event under SGATAR's banner as its purpose is to facilitate the alignment of various tax systems in the Asia-Pacific region to foster co-operation, trade and investment. This is the first time this event has been offered to all members of SGATAR, as well as our regional partners.

This year, Australia re-joined the SGATAR Taskforce alongside Thailand and the Republic of Korea as we prepare to host the annual meeting in 2025. It is a privilege to be back on the Taskforce and work with others to deliver meaningful outcomes for our region. The ATO is committed to enhancing capacity building for members through the sharing of best practices and strengthening training programs, as this workshop demonstrates.

Also joining us are some of our key development partners, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, as well as the Pacific Islands Tax Administrators Association. Welcome to you all.

I'm also pleased that the Executive Chair and acting CEO of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, and the Director of Taxation from the Palau's Bureau of Revenue and Taxation have joined us, as well as representatives from Norway and the United Kingdom. Although, I should warn you that our Norwegian colleague, Torstein Hoem, is practically a local as he is currently based in Brisbane with the ATO on secondment – most certainly a change in climate for him!

Over the next three days we have a great agenda, framed around the needs of our region and the growing expectations from government of tax administrations.

The agenda was designed by reviewing SGATAR training priorities, identifying opportunities relevant to the needs of member jurisdictions through survey responses, and exploring areas for training collaboration with international organisations. As such, we hope this event meets your expectations and provides opportunities to promote cooperation and communication amongst tax administrations. Your

active participation will enhance our shared commitment in advancing global and regional economic prosperity.

Today, we will focus on data and information sharing. This includes the growing use of data by tax administrations, new advancements in the Common Reporting Standard and Country by Country reporting, Exchange of Information and how to navigate Mutual Agreement Procedures and arbitration. This last topic is one of particular interest to me, so I am very much looking forward to that session.

On our second day, we will turn our minds to compliance and the management of risk. This will look at some of the ways we monitor compliance here at the ATO, such as the Top 100 and 1000 programs and our use of Justified Trust. We'll also delve into our risk models, as well as our approach to tax crime, a growing concern across many tax administrations.

On our final day, we will look to the future. This will include how we navigate constant and rapid change in technology and digitalisation. Central to this is putting the client first and designing systems that make it easy for them to comply and hard not to. We will look at strategies for debt collection and delve deeper into the world of tax gaps, a topic the ATO has been interested in for some time. Our last sessions will focus on workforce, and how we can create a space for our people that is both inclusive and diverse.

As you can see, this is a great opportunity to have meaningful discussions with your colleagues from neighbouring authorities, share insights, ask questions, and learn from each other. It will also allow us to delve deeper into the subject matter and learn about the current trends, experiences, challenges, and treatment strategies that your fellow tax administrators employ.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to each of you for your dedication to multilateral partnerships, we appreciate your support in travelling so far to attend this workshop. We hope that when you head home in three days, you will do so with renewed enthusiasm for tax administration and having made some new connections with your colleagues from around the region.

Thank you again for your commitment and presence, I look forward to our discussions.

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