Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It's a genuine pleasure to be here today in Canberra for the launch of this book. I would like to start by thanking the Minister for Foreign Affairs for his agreement to launch the book and the comments that we have just heard. Most importantly, I want to thank the Minister and AusAID for supporting this project and for having the vision at an early stage to see how this effort would contribute to the realization of the objectives of Australia's aid program.

I have had a fairly long career – in fact several distinct careers – where my work has been related to international trade and development. For the past three and a half years, I have worked out of Adelaide at our Institute where about forty percent of our work is addressed to special research projects like this book and over fifty percent of our work is on the ground specialized capacity-building work in developing countries mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.

I also have the honor to be a member of the Foreign Affairs Minister’s Aid Advisory Council where I have been involved in the launch of the Government's new White Paper on Australian Aid. The White Paper explicitly recognizes the contribution that open trade makes to growth and development. The Australian aid program also reflects the view that effective poverty reduction strategies require domestic reform as well as a fair multilateral trading system. The book fits perfectly with this view of the world.

Of all the projects I have been involved with, I think this book will always be the project that I am most proud of. When we initiated the project, we knew it would be risky, but AusAID, the WTO and our Institute shared a common commitment to the underlying aim of the research.

As the Minister has noted already, there was an important gap that needed to be filled.

- Like everyone, we heard daily about the problems faced by developing countries and we heard critics of the multilateral system lay the blame at the door of the WTO.
• Critics say the system works for the big rich countries and against the interests of the poor.
• Critics say the multinational companies control the WTO and call the shots on the rules and that developing countries have no real chance to use the system for their advantage.

But many of us have seen evidence of developing countries benefiting from the opportunities of the global trading system and even using the rules of the system to enforce their rights in disputes with large powerful nations. It is also obvious that some economies have learned how to use the system and others are only still learning.

In a nutshell, the story the book tells is this: the international trading system gives you the opportunities to do what you want with it. How individual countries act in response and the results they produce is more or less up to them on a national level – the very antithesis of those who argue that the WTO robs countries of their sovereignty.

With very few exceptions, these stories have been written by local people “on the ground” in the countries that are the subject of the case studies. Interviews with the actual economic and political actors are an essential part of the stories, as are attributable quotations. The case studies are real-life histories that tell real peoples’ views.

We asked our authors to end their stories with a section called “lessons for others – the players views”. We did this partly because we think everyone learns important lessons and partly because we suspected that there would be important insights for other readers of these case studies. We were not disappointed.

One of the really great things about the book is that it is possible to compare and contrast how two different countries deal with similar situations. You can read about how telecommunications services were successfully liberalized in Barbados but a similar effort in Sri Lanka has not turned out so well.

We can compare and contrast how neighbors Argentina and Uruguay participate in services negotiations.

And there are many different stories documenting the difficult process of accession to the WTO – including the story of Vanuatu where the government decided at the last minute to pull the plug on joining the WTO.

This is not a book on trade theory. It is a book about what happens out there in the real world. For that reason, it is a book that should have a great deal of practical utility for governments, business people and NGOs as well as for academics who teach international trade policy.

As one of the commentators, the Financial Times columnist Guy de Jonquières, states on the book’s back cover,

“This book is a refreshing antidote to many of the popular myths and misconceptions of the WTO. Its wealth of case studies shows how membership creates opportunities and rights as well as obligations, and that what individual countries make of them is the key determinant of their success in harnessing the benefits of trade.”
I like to think that this has been the real contribution of this project. At our Institute, we look forward to a strong ongoing relationship with the Australian Government and AusAID in research, training and policy advice so that together we can advance the trade and development objectives of the aid program.

Once again, thank you Minister and thank you to AusAID for supporting this project. We look forward to working with you on the next installment.

Thank you.