

# Interview with Professor Andrew MacIntyre

Director, The Australian APEC Study Centre at RMIT University

This is an edited transcript of an interview with Professor Andrew MacIntyre, the Director of the Australian APEC Study Centre at RMIT University. Prof MacIntyre has now been in his role for a little over three months and in this interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNGJBM9sBcM&feature=youtu.be> he talks about his background and discusses the rise of protectionism, the increasing digitisation of economies in the APEC region and where APEC might be heading. Prof MacIntyre is interviewed by Dr Errol Muir, editor of APEC Currents.

**EM:** Prof MacIntyre, you've now been appointed for three months or so. Can you tell us a little bit about your background, your work in trade issues and economics at Universities, and your other activities.

**Prof. MacIntyre:** Sure. I have spent all my professional life living in, working in, visiting APEC economies. I've either lived in, worked in, or visited almost all of them now. My main research themes have been pretty much APEC



sorts of themes or themes that infuse the life of APEC around governance, around economic reform, and around regional cooperation. Before coming here to RMIT I was at the Australian National University for quite a while, and before that at the University of California in San Diego. Both of those places are big champions of APEC and its work. And since coming to RMIT I had the good fortune to join the Advisory Board of the APEC Centre and discovering what a gem of an organisation it is. I'd like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to people who have come before us, who have built up the organisation in such a wonderful centre. In particular our former chairman, Alan Oxley, and our former director, Ken Waller. It's people like this that have made the Centre the great success that it is.

**EM:** One of the issues that APEC has been looking at is the growth of protectionism. It's generally acknowledged that an open trading economy has driven much of world growth in the last decade or so. But we have seen a resurgence in protectionism, particularly since President Trump came to office in the United States. What are your thoughts on this resurgence and about where APEC might go in trying to deal with it.

**Prof. MacIntyre:** this is clearly a really challenging time. I would say protectionism and more inward looking politics has been gaining momentum progressively since, roughly, the global financial crisis. We see it quite conspicuously in nationalist politics now in some major places: Britain, the United States, China. But we see it in many APEC economies including our own. This inward turn, this rising protectionism, now outright

trade hostility between the United States and China. Things are complicated by being coupled with assaults on the dispute resolution mechanisms of the WTO and more broadly, a weakening of cross-border investment round the world. So, worrying times for the global economy. For our region, all eyes are on the upcoming summit. Encouragingly, APEC's Business Advisory Council has come up with a clear and strong statement that it is submitting to leaders about the sorts of reform they see as necessary. But we need to be under no illusion that the politics of this in key countries around the region is not conducive at the moment. So this is a really challenging time for APEC.

**EM:** One of the other issues that APEC has been dealing with is the digital economy and the ways in which the digital economy can drive world trade and improve living standards across all countries in the APEC region. How do you see this debate developing and how do you see digitisation affecting international trade.

**Prof. MacIntyre:** I think this is a one of the really exciting areas for all of us. Here in the higher education sector particularly, many of us are charged up by thinking about what might be possible, particularly for cross-border delivery of education services. But if I think about APEC, and what APEC can be doing in this area, two things stand out for me. One is a basic threshold issue of ensuring widespread access to affordable, high-speed digital capability in economies around the region. We are not there yet. We know in Australia we are not there yet. So that's a basic threshold which is still an issue. But moving beyond that, something that APEC can and is helping with, is how we harmonise different privacy regimes that exist around the region, and here the APEC cross-border privacy rules system is starting to get momentum. Singapore joining up to that earlier this year is adding momentum. And that's an area where, if we can get clearer and more agreed frameworks for protection of consumer data, we can see things starting to move.

**EM:** protectionism and digitisation are two areas where APEC has worked in the past. For the future, the APEC Leaders' summit is going to look at the future of APEC – things that it might do in the future. What are your thoughts on where that might head and, in particular, what effect it might have on the APEC Study Centre.

**Prof. MacIntyre:** Let's start with the encouraging. The APEC Post 2020 vision group is coming up with a nice vision for the future of APEC. But again we can be under no illusion. There is growing unease about the ability of APEC countries to come together, to get agreement on major issues, and get traction on them. This unease has been growing for some time. There are multiple fora out there vying for precedence for regional cooperation.

Two little noticed, little remarked, side benefits of APEC are important here. One that is always below the headlines is the value of the ongoing and institutionalised meetings among senior officials from across APEC economies and also business leaders from across APEC economies. Anyone involved in those linkages knows the value of them. The other is the opportunity that APEC summits afford for leaders of APEC economies to come together in whatever combination is necessary at that time, for meetings on the margin of the main forum to resolve pressing issues of the day.

Those are nontrivial benefits. That said, if APEC is unable on a sustained basis, to gain traction on the issues for which it is set up, to advance, questions will increasingly be asked about how much things like these side benefits are worth relative to other fora that might be out there. And that's where all of us that care

about APEC, that care about the mission it was set up with, need to redouble our efforts. Here at the Australian APEC Study Centre I can stay with confidence, with certainty, that we are going to redouble our efforts in linking up with Australian policymakers, Australian business leaders, and joining with them and counterparts in other APEC economies to push harder and further on making the case for free and open trade. And freer and more open investment. To push on new linkages where we can build understandings, where we can build collaborative research, to come up with new practical initiatives that have a chance of working their way up through the system. That's what we can be doing.

**EM:** thanks for that Prof MacIntyre. It sounds that there are lots of challenges ahead for APEC and for the study Centre.

**Prof. MacIntyre:** and we have a lot of work to do!