

# Lessons of NAFTA for APEC 10.18.96

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### Lessons of NAFTA for APEC

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### ABSTRACT

At the beginning of this decade, environmentalists truly began to discover trade issues. The debate between environmentalists and trade liberation proponents has usually been framed by two questions: "How does trade liberalization harm the environment?" and "How do environmental protection measures interfere with trade liberalization?" Few have asked "Is it possible to promote trade liberalization while maintaining or increasing the level of environmental protection?" Seemingly, the only two paths have been to keep trade and environmental agreements separate, or to completely integrate them into some whole system. To keep them separate contemplated the need for conflict resolution between them, while the integrated approach suggested that conflict avoidance was the correct solution.

This paper demonstrates that the model of regional environmental decision-making in North America provides significant lessons for liberalizing trade while protecting the environment. At present, APEC seems committed to a path of separate treatment of environmental issues. This paper reviews North America's complex blend of direct integration and parallel agreements and argues that while some of the balances were not ideal, this blended approach suggests some solutions to increase APEC's level of environmental protection at the same time that trade is liberalized. Applying the lessons from NAFTA and combining them with the unique APEC circumstances may result in even more promising environmental performance. Thus, the North American example holds important lessons for APEC.

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