

**WELCOME REMARKS BY MR LEE KWONG WENG,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL FOR ESTATE AGENCIES (CEA),
AT THE CEA ESTATE AGENCY INDUSTRY CONFERENCE
ON 26 MARCH 2019, 2PM**

Mr Zaqy Mohamad, Minister of State, Ministry of National Development and
Ministry of Manpower

Mr Quek See Tiat, President, Council for Estate Agencies

Partners from the real estate agency industry

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 A very good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to today's estate agency industry conference.

2 This inaugural conference provides an opportunity for us to come together at the industry level to share updates and exchange views on developments in the industry.

CEA's close engagement with the industry

3 Today's conference marks a key milestone in CEA's continuing engagement efforts with the estate agency industry over the last four years. CEA has held many meetings and discussions with the industry associations namely SEAA, IEA, SISV, and KEO Connect. CEA also organised a number of focus groups involving property agents to discuss specific issues. Personally, I also had the opportunity to interact with many KEOs, training providers, and special interest groups through more than 30 small group dialogue sessions.

4 These engagement sessions are important. This is because the industry is being disrupted. Also, the estate agency industry is not homogenous. The ages of property agents range from 20s to 70s, and educational qualifications from PSLE to PhD holders. Property agents' professional development needs therefore vary substantially. In response, as an example, CEA worked with NTUC LearningHub to develop a digital skills training course. The course is contextualised for the industry, for agents who feel they need to be better prepared for a digital work environment. You may wish to drop by the NTUC LearningHub booth during the tea break later.

5 The industry structure is also skewed as it consists of a few large property agencies and more than a thousand small agencies. 82 per cent of property

agents are with the 10 largest agencies. The large agencies and small agencies face slightly different challenges.

6 For instance, the span of control of a KEO in a large agency is understandably more challenging than that of a KEO of a small agency. For the large agencies, team leaders therefore have an important role to play. CEA has thus invited team leaders from the large agencies to attend the conference today so that they can be more aware of industry issues that are usually discussed with KEOs. CEA will also work with the industry to explore ways to enhance team leadership and supervisory practices.

CEA will continue to support industry in its transformation journey

7 The industry has come a long way since 2010 when CEA was formed to regulate the industry. That was the first transformation for the industry. It has transformed from the old image of a cowboy town to a more disciplined profession today. Today, we see more agents conducting their work professionally and taking a client-centric approach when facilitating property transactions.

8 We are always glad to hear from consumers who are delighted by their agents' professionalism and service. In CEA's quarterly newsletter "*CEAenergy*", we feature KEOs and agents whose clients shared their positive experiences with us. Wilfred Chua, KEO of WJ Lloyds, is an example. I understand that Wilfred is here with us at the conference today.

Wilfred's client had praised him as being "incredibly helpful" and was impressed when Wilfred went the extra mile to the extent of giving himself extra work. We know that there are many other KEOs and agents like Wilfred who have likewise provided exemplary service for their clients. I would like to encourage everyone to be customer centric and not just sales centric.

9 The industry is now going through a second transformation to ensure it remains relevant. The industry has to further raise its professionalism and efficiency to respond to market conditions. It has to tap on technology to boost productivity and better meet consumers' higher expectations. I am pleased to note that many property agencies are investing in and making available digital tools to empower your agents to work smarter and more productively, to help their clients make informed decisions. I would like to encourage more agencies to take the lead in embracing digital transformation and drive digital readiness efforts. In this regard, I urge the CEOs and KEOs to sign the Digital Participation Pledge. This is one of the recommendations in the Digital Readiness Blueprint that was launched by the Ministry of Communications and

Information in June last year. You can find out more about the Digital Participation Pledge at the Infocomm Media Development Authority's booth during the tea break later.

10 Embracing and adopting technology is one key aspect of the Real Estate Industry Transformation Map (ITM) that was launched last year. Since then, CEA has been working closely with the industry to implement the ITM initiatives. The items lined up for the Conference this afternoon will touch on the progress of these initiatives. We will also share ideas on where we can go from here, and how we can chart new frontiers together.

11 To help facilitate the industry in its transformation process, CEA will continue to take a balanced regulatory approach. CEA will reduce regulatory burden on the industry where appropriate without compromising consumers' interest. For instance, in late 2015, CEA did away with the requirement for the annual expiry date of registration to be indicated on individual agent cards. As a result, about 30,000 plastic agent cards can be recycled for use every year. In February 2018, CEA introduced fully paperless submissions for property agents' registration applications. We have also removed the need for KEOs to submit agencies' ACRA Business Profiles to CEA for the renewal exercise starting last year. These changes translate to time and cost savings for both property agencies and agents.

Conclusion

12 In conclusion, I would say that the operating environment of the industry will continue to evolve and will continue to be challenging. However, I am glad to note that the industry is responding to these challenges. The industry is also making the effort to have greater collaboration within the industry to ride the transformation journey together and not see each other purely as competitors. CEA will certainly help the industry along.

13 On a personal note, I would also like to formally update you that I will be retiring after 37 years of public service. I would like to introduce you to the Executive Director designate for CEA, Mr Lim Chee Hwee. Mr Lim is currently a senior director with the Ministry of National Development. He will succeed me with effect from 24 April 2019. I thank all of you for your support and close collaboration. I am confident you will continue to work closely with CEA under Mr Lim's leadership to lift the real estate industry to a higher level of professionalism and trust with consumers.

Thank you.