

Comment: Singapore's new competition chief envisions a 'proactive, forward-thinking' regulator

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By [Jet Damazo-Santos](#)

With a strong background in prosecution and a diverse range of government experiences, Alvin Koh, the new chief executive of the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore, told MLex that his goal is for the commission to be a “proactive, forward-thinking, and trusted regulator.” Five months into the job, he has already started work on achieving this.

Since being appointed chief executive of Singapore’s competition regulator at the start of April, Alvin Koh has been busy not just with enforcement matters and networking with his foreign counterparts, but also with rethinking how the commission can remain relevant amid the rapid pace of change.

Over the past five months, he has initiated a comprehensive review of the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore’s strategic initiatives, expanded hiring efforts and established a new Policy Unit for forward-thinking, longer-term planning, among others.

“The last few months have been a most exciting and productive period for me,” he said in written responses to MLex.

The city-state’s new antitrust chief has been in the government for over two decades, with stints ranging from government procurement and white-collar crime prosecution to tax law, labor law and, yes, competition law. All these, he said, have shaped his view and approach to his new role.

“Having worked on diverse policy issues and led cross-agency initiatives in previous capacities, I have gained a deep understanding of navigating complex regulatory environments and driving collaboration across different sectors,” Koh said.

This, he said, has equipped him to lead the CCCS with “a focus on strategic decision-making and effective stakeholder engagement.”

But beyond all the planning and strategizing, it seems Koh is equally focused on cracking the whip.

— Step-up in enforcement —

A read of Koh’s background also shows a strong prosecution experience that dovetails with the recent increase in enforcement activity seen from the CCCS.

Before he served as the competition regulator’s legal and enforcement director from 2008 to 2012, he had already served as a deputy public prosecutor for the Attorney General’s Chambers and the Singapore Police Force.

When he was the chief legal officer of the Inland Revenue Service, his LinkedIn profile states that he grew the legal team and improved litigation win rates. In his last position as chief legal officer of the Ministry of Manpower, prior to returning to competition the competition agency, he also led a large team of prosecutors.

By the time he took over the helm of the CCCS, his predecessor, Sia Aik Kor, had already laid out a pipeline of enforcement cases (see [here](#)).

From issuing just three infringement decisions from 2020 to 2022, the CCCS has over the past year publicized dawn raids in the building construction sector (see [here](#)), issued a proposed bid-rigging infringement decision in the interior fit-out construction services industry (see [here](#)) and issued a bid-rigging decision that saw it penalize an individual for the first time (see [here](#)).

The CCCS has also sent out a warning to car dealers telling them to remove warranty restrictions (see [here](#)), effectively blocked Grab’s “anti-competitive” plan to acquire Trans-cab (see [here](#)) and even launched an investigation into the anticompetitive impacts of Grab’s possible acquisition of Foodpanda even before it was confirmed (see [here](#)).

And there's more to come. "Our teams are also working on a number of other cartel cases, including leniency applications, so watch this space for updates," Koh said.

— Proactive, forward-thinking —

But it seems Koh wants to step things up even further. During a brief chat with MLex on the sidelines of a recent conference in Singapore, he mentioned wanting faster turnarounds for cases.

In his written answers, he indicated this again, saying he has "reinvigorated" the case teams and expanded hiring efforts, "bringing in top quality candidates from leading law firms, economists and data scientists."

He also established a new Policy Unit because he felt the commission's "previous approach was somewhat reactive."

"So we established a Policy Unit to focus on forward-thinking, strengthen our policy development and strategize for the longer term," he explained.

It appears he's applying this strategic forward-thinking approach to the CCCS' key focus areas: digital markets, price transparency and supporting Singapore's green transition.

"Some of these initiatives are still in the early stages and will require more time to materialize," he said. "But you can see from what I mentioned earlier that many of the things we are doing, for example hiring data scientists, investing in technology to do our work better and even putting aside experienced officers to start a Policy Unit will yield results in the future."

The same forward-thinking applies to his approach to international cooperation.

"I have placed much emphasis on linking up with foreign competition authorities to lay the foundations for further cooperation, particularly in cases of mutual interest," he said.

Competition lawyers in Singapore have similarly commented that they expect a more visibly active CCCS under Koh.

"My vision for the CCCS during my tenure is to ensure that we remain agile, responsive, and impactful so that we remain relevant in this dynamic market environment," Koh said.

"Ultimately, my goal is for the CCCS to be a proactive, forward-thinking, and trusted regulator that protects the interests of consumers and businesses while contributing positively to Singapore's broader economic landscape."

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Areas of Interest: Antitrust

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