

SUBMISSION NO 16

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House, Canberra
Email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

I wish to register a strong objection to the limited time for submissions on 13 proposed international treaties including an Agreement with Uruguay on Promotion and Protection of Investments, an Agreement with Egypt on the Promotion and Protection of Investment and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER). The two bilateral investment treaties contain investor-state complaints mechanisms which allow corporations to challenge government legislation and to sue governments for damages.

We object to these provisions as an undermining of democratic governance and an expansion of legal powers for corporations which can already exercise huge economic influence on governments. The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) is an agreement which provides the framework for future free trade agreements which would include the removal of all trade and investment barriers between Australia and New Zealand and the much smaller and vulnerable economies of the Pacific Islands.

It is proposed that Australia ratify the PACER Agreement at the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2002. Non-government organisations in the Pacific Islands have noted that PACER has not been widely debated by the public or by parliaments in the region and have raised the following questions:

- (i) the impact of a free trade agreements on traditional communal ownership of land and on the ability to regulate use of natural resources such as minerals and timber
- (ii) the impact of free trade in government procurement on the ability of governments to encourage local development through purchasing products from local firms
- (iii) the impact of liberalisation of food imports on food security and health. Studies of countries such as Fiji and Tonga have shown that cheap food imports have undercut local food products, driven local farmers out of business and have led to higher consumption of fatty and high-carbohydrate foods with consequent health impacts We ask that the committee consider these questions carefully and if necessary extend the time for the inquiry.

Yours sincerely
Frances Milne
or Economic Reform Australia