

ACISFTA
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From: Michael Baume [mailto:mebaume@yahoo.com.au]
Sent: Wednesday, 5 May 2004 11:08 PM
To: Morris, Julia (REPS)
Subject: Michael Baume AO Submission to JSCOT for 6.4.04

Brief Opening Statement

My appearance before this committee stems from my role, when Consul-General in New York from 1996 to 2001, in joining with the Australian Ambassador to the US, Mr Michael Thawley, in generating widespread corporate support in the US for the concept of an Australia-US Free Trade Agreement. I should add that in my official capacity I had several meetings with US pharmaceutical companies, particularly Pfizer which is headquartered in New York. I am patron of the American Australian Association in New York and received the medal of the US Foreign Policy Association for my role in improving Australian-US relations, the only other Australian recipient of which is Prime Minister Howard.

My appearance here also emerges from my deep involvement with the Arts in Australia, having been Shadow Minister for the Arts as a member of the Senate, a member of the Council of the National Gallery of Australia, and I am still a director and Trustee of the American Friends of the Australian National Gallery, am on the Council of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and have been involved as a patron of the Bell Shakespeare Company.

My concerns rest on what I consider, at best, to be a misguided and, at worst, a dishonest campaign against the proposed Free Trade Agreement, which appears to rest more on ideological and political agendas than on the evidence in the words and spirit of the agreement. The nature of much of the evidence presented to this committee, and to the concurrent Senate committee, reinforces this impression, as the great bulk of it rests on the same polemic restated over and over again, as if the frequency of ill-founded assertions gives them added substance.

As a result, I want to focus my appearance here to challenge much of the evidence presented against the FTA in the areas of the Arts and Health. In that context, recent articles I have written for the

Australian Financial Review form part of my formal submission.

In particular, my submission deals with overseas evidence that demolishes the unsubstantiated claim by arts lobbyists that Australian drama will be forced off TV screens by a collapse of the revenue of free-to-air TV under pressure from a doubling of PAY-TV audiences to match the US proportion of 50 percent.

In many of the Arts and Health submissions there was a heavy anti-American bias evident, indicating an agenda that had little to do with the merit or otherwise of the specifics of this agreement.