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From: Michael Mullerworth [SMTP:mully@melbpc.org.au]
Sent: Wednesday, August 16, 2000 4:20 PM
To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: Submission to Joint Sitting Committee on Treaties

(N.B. Earlier identical submission regrettably did not carry my name and address.)

Dear Sirs,

I am grateful for the opportunity to express an opinion on the World Trade Organisation, and Australia's relationship to it in particular. I do not believe that the WTO is functioning in the interests of anyone except the forces which dominate it, namely large transnational corporations and the governments of some of the more powerful nations. There is clear evidence that WTO decisions override, or are used as an excuse to override, national decisions or actions in the local or national interest. Recent examples of this have been the importation of Canadian salmon into Australia at the risk of infecting local farmed salmon, and the furore over car seat covers made from Australian leather. Underdeveloped countries suffer even more, losing out to large agricultural conglomerates and being forced into large-scale infrastructure projects at the insistence of agencies such as the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF. Small-scale local enterprises are swamped everywhere, there is less product diversity, and produce must now be transported great distances to meet needs previously met locally, especially FOOD. This alone adds hugely to greenhouse gas emissions.

Sirs, as the primary aim of the WTO is to ensure free trade (read unrestricted competition), and as the WTO appears to be above national governments, surely the largest and most aggressive organisations will prevail, but how can they be controlled? There is no international regulator to appeal to, no-one who can enforce anti-monopoly or anti-trust laws, because the WTO both makes the rules and judges "infringements". "Retaliatory actions" are sanctioned. The views represented in the WTO are predominantly those of big business and industry, and the governments of the economic giants, who depend on those sectors for their existence. The voices of small people, those deprived of their living or even land, and cries about loss of self-reliance and environmental irresponsibility are not heard. The WTO is inherently undemocratic.

Please consider the following points:

1. Australian Government decisions and new legislation have to be framed in the light of WTO rules, even if the Australian national interest demands otherwise. The WTO is not an elected body, and its decisions are almost impossible to challenge or reverse. Our government chooses to ignore criticism from international human rights organisations both about local affairs

and when it impinges on our trade relations, but appears submissively beholden to the directives of the WTO.

2. By promoting trade we are increasing use of transport and energy, and therefore of greenhouse gases, as well as accelerating the use of other raw materials because COST-CUTTING means less care for the environment- in particular no responsibility for any WASTE or POLLUTION produced. Because how

can any national government or local body enforce its laws if the perpetrator has either already been given freedoms in return for investment, or can threaten to withdraw if restrictions are applied?

3. By denying the "Precautionary Rule" the WTO is putting all living things and the environment as a whole at risk. It should be the responsibility of the maker of a new product to prove its safety (within reason) before it is released onto the market. Instead, the WTO chooses to say that it must be freely available and cannot be prohibited (by another country) unless THAT COUNTRY can show that it is unsafe.

4. The WTO is in favour of WORLD-WIDE patents on altered living material. This has resulted in the theft of plant, animal, and human material especially from poor countries, and its monopolisation by others. Examples are plant variety rights, and the hijacking of Basmati rice from the Indian subcontinent and Jasmine rice from Thailand.

5. It is intolerable that even Government procurements must be subject to open (i.e. even international) tender, and that the lowest bidder should be chosen. After all, we are talking about taxpayers money which our elected government has been chosen to administer. How can the WTO be made accountable for that? In all its actions, the WTO is only "accountable" to itself.

6. I do not see a way to improve the WTO, rather I think the idea of Corporate World Directorship is to be prevented. If we do not do so, where is "government"? Even the Free Market needs governance. And national or local identity cannot be preserved without national and local government that has meaning.

I urge the Committee at least to consider moves to alter the general policy direction of the WTO, including standing up for national interests, but also to redirect attention to the environment, social issues, labour standards, and ecological sustainability rather than purely monetary value.

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