

Andrew Gemmell
86 Henkel Street
Brunswick
Victoria 3056
Phone: 9650 1444
Fax: 9650 7622

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The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Dear Sir/Madam,

AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

I was raised in a right wing environment. My late father was an oil company director. There have been two world wars this century to defend democracy.

By overruling the decisions of democratically elected "local" governments the World Trade Organisation is downgrading democracy. World trade decisions, influenced by the wealthiest lobby groups, should be subject to appeal not to the same organisation that made the original decision but to higher authorities.

The International Court for Justice has been ignored by governments too often. With no other option the International Court for Justice should be one of the higher authorities. The International Court for Justice should be given real teeth. I do not know much about the makeup of the International Court for Justice, however I doubt it is dominated by those obsessed by short term profits and access to the global market place.

Health should also be a higher priority than trade. The World Health Organisation should also be given the power to overrule decisions made by the World Trade Organisation. The health of the people is inextricably linked to the to the environment and the World Trade Organisation has made too many decisions that threaten the environment (CAFE ruling, TED ruling, Salmon ruling, Australian company inspected meat equivalency ruling). The latter ruling may benefit Australian companies financially in the short term but if we make our trading partners sick, there will be no long term benefit to Australian companies. If the United Nations does not already have an environmental arm, it should get one quickly.

It appears that the World Trade Organisation has not given local environmental considerations enough weight when making decisions about alleged "non tariff barriers". The World Trade Organisation seems to

be picking the lowest common denominator and claiming environmental standards above that, are “non tariff barriers”. If this continues the major corporate polluters will never improve.

The World Trade Organisation should not be involved in providing alternative ways for multi national corporations to gain access to markets that are already subject to multilateral agreements. Also multilateral agreements should not be allowed to provide a back door method for multi national corporations to move their manufacturing base to the source of the cheapest labour. The source of the cheapest labour is often in countries without democratic values or where corruption flourishes. Australian companies operating overseas should be subject to Australian laws.

As there is little opportunity for community involvement in Australia’s dealings with the WTO, I would like to take this opportunity to urge the committee to continue to defend democracy and recommend Australia’s withdrawal from the WTO until the justice, health and environmental arms of the United Nations can properly regulate it.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gemmell