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From: ieva [SMTP:ievai@bigpond.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 23, 2000 12:10 AM
To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: Submission on Australia's relationship with the WTO

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
on
Australia's Relationship with the World Trade Organisation

The World Trade Organisation prioritizes trade and commercial considerations over all other values.

The rules of the WTO reduce the choices available to democratically elected governments, under threat of harsh penalties for violations. Thus policies, essential to protect human rights and the environment can and are being sidelined by our government, using the WTO as an external constraint.

An example of the use of the WTO to erode human rights is the willingness of The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to trade away the rights of Australians to be able to choose genetically engineered foods.

Section 10 of the Australian New Zealand Food Authority Act 1991 maintains its objective to be "The provision of adequate information relating to the food to enable consumers to make informed choices and to prevent fraud and deception". The Australian Government and industry have known since 1995 from many surveys that over 95% of Australians demand mandatory, comprehensive labelling of GE foods. They demand the right to be able to choose to which risks they will expose themselves and their families.

Yet the Australian National Farmers Federation, in order to gain access to US markets, are prepared to challenge this right through the WTO. If they actually succeed in denying us this basic right, then the NFF must be held legally and financially accountable for the risks that GE foods pose for public health and the environment. Keep in mind that the risks are considered by the insurance industry of such magnitude that they are uninsurable.

A situation such as this, where one sector of the Australian community can deprive the majority of Australians of their basic rights by using an external power, must surely rank as an act of treachery and should be recognized as such.

It is indefensible for the democratically elected government of a country to seek a relationship with an external organisation that actively promotes denial of the basic rights of its citizens.

I therefore demand:

1. An extension on the August 25th deadline for submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties be implemented.

2. A National referendum be held on Australia's membership of the WTO.
3. A detailed analysis be prepared taking into consideration the affects of all WTO agreements on all Australian communities, not only the business community.
4. That corporations be made criminally liable for any anti-democratic influence that may directly affect Australians.
5. That Australia's DFAT officials be made criminally liable for misrepresenting the wishes of Australian people.
6. That Australia withdraw from all WTO negotiations until such time that the Australian Government can prove beyond reasonable doubt that we will all benefit from membership in the WTO.
7. Considering that Australia's trade representatives have taken on themselves to trade not just commodities but the rights of its citizens, without consultation with its citizens, they should be held legally accountable to the people of Australia.

Until these issues are addressed, any debate about the topics in the terms of reference is irrelevant.

Yours sincerely,

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