

7 September 2000

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

By facsimile: 02 6277-4827

Re: Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation

SPAA would like to provide brief comments to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties' inquiry into Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation, in particular to the extent to which social, cultural and environmental considerations influence WTO priorities and decision making.

In preparation for the January 2000 round of WTO negotiations in Seattle, SPAA, along with the other production industry bodies, made a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) prepared by the Communications Law Centre. The Department indicated that the Government intended to isolate the audio-visual industries from any further liberalisation during the Seattle round.

This was confirmed by a speech to the National Press Club by the Minister for Trade, Mark Vaile, when he said, "We support a comprehensive approach to the services negotiations. But any offers that we make of further opening any specific markets will take full account of our specific national interests, including such areas as audiovisual and health. In particular, I shall ensure that any negotiations in the audio-visual sector take account of Australia's cultural policy objectives. We promote our local film and television industry. We do so to define our identity at home and our image abroad - as do most countries."

We strongly support the Minister's statements and reiterate our commitment to the isolation of Australia's audio-visual industry from any further liberalisation.

In reference to your committee, we would like to advocate that social, cultural and environmental considerations should actively influence WTO priorities and decision-making. The objective of Australia and the WTO should be to manage the impacts of global trade so that national cultures, and the creativity that sustains them, are preserved and enhanced.

Please do not hesitate to contact SPAA if you would like any further comment. An electronic version of this letter has also been sent.

Yours sincerely

Nick Herd
Executive Director