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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
Email: jscot@aph.gov.au

Re: Singapore Free Trade Agreement

We are concerned that the Singapore/Australia free trade agreement (SAFTA) has been conducted (by the Federal Government) in secret without community consultation.

- We recommend that until the Joint Standing Committee on treaties (JSCOT) review is complete no decision relating to SAFTA be made. And that any decision must be preceded by extensive public consultation.

We are alarmed to learn that all sectors, laws and policies will be included in the agreement unless they are specifically excluded in the treaty. This condition will prevent future democratically elected governments from being able to introduce policies legislation etc in the interests of future generations of Australians with different societal needs.

We are further concerned that this model is to be used for the US/Australia free trade agreement (USFTA) providing opportunities for the take over of public services by powerful private companies.

- We recommend that JSCOT should not support a negative model for services and investment in trade agreements

We are very concerned that state and local governments provision of services will also be restricted under the SAFTA and USFTA agreements.

- We recommend that JSCOT oppose the restrictions on governments at all levels to regulate and maintain essential services and investment.

We are of the opinion that it is undemocratic for private corporations (under the SAFTA) to be empowered to take democratically elected governments in Australia to an international complaints tribunal, on the basis that laws, rules regulations and subsidies enacted by those governments discriminate against free trade. Further that these tribunals will have discretion to fine or otherwise force government to abandon long standing measures enacted for the benefit of their constituents.

- We recommend that an investor State Complaints mechanism not be supported by JSCOT

We believe that the governments procurement policies should be maintained in order to foster and support home grown industries.

- We therefore recommend that there be no restrictions on the right of governments to use a purchasing policy for industry and regional development.

Sincerely

Darani Lewers AM
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