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From: Stan Stanfield [SMTP:westering@one.net.au]
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To: jsct@aph.gov.au
Subject: Australia's relationship with the WTO

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Australia's Relationship with the WTO

Australia should help the process of limiting the WTO to trade issues only.

The WTO should not have the power to force nations not to have barriers of a socio-cultural, environmental, and/or health & safety nature, under the rubric of their being a "restraint of trade". Examples:

(a) If a country has a No Sunday Selling policy, eg, that is and should continue to be their (cultural) business. Neither the WTO, nor any other entity with an agenda of "opening up trade" (or any other agenda, for that matter) should be allowed to force a culture to be "harmonised" to an arbitrary international standard through the means of a trade-oriented tactic.

Conversely, if a country does not have certain social policies that, eg, socialists consider as "human rights" issues, the WTO should not have the power to impose those standards on nations. (NB: this would include labour standards.)

(b) If a country has an environmental policy stronger than one surfacing under a "harmonisation" tactic, its elimination and forced inclusion in a "harmonised" position would be and is an unfair imposition on the part of the WTO, in interfering excessively in a nation's internal affairs.

This category includes quarantine regulations. Tasmania, eg, should have every right to block possibly diseased salmon from import into its jurisdiction, in order to protect its native fish industry. (They should have to prove their case, of course.)

The above example also highlights the desirable role of Australia, in WTO deliberations, in supporting, in a federal system of government, the limits of power of the central government over its constituent states - that nations have CONSTITUTIONS that take precedence over such as international agreements on trade.

(c) If a country wishes to have stronger restrictions on GMOs, eg, than some big industry-dictated "harmonisation" standards, that, again, should be their business. (This example straddles both 'agriculture' and 'health & safety' categories. It also includes the individual-state argument in a federal system of government, whereby a state wishing to produce GM-clean produce, for domestic and/or overseas consumption, should be allowed to maintain the right not to have GM products running the risk of contaminating their products.)

This argument includes, eg, the position that the EU should have every

right to refuse entry into its market of meat products that are drug- and/or antibiotic-laced. And the 'proof' of a health-&-safety risk should be considered under the Precautionary Principle; not under a 'palpable proof' principle, where the result may not be known for some time after the fact - ie, too late.

IN SUMMARY

For a nation to put tariffs on goods coming across its borders is one thing, worthy of WTO discussion on better ways to enhance world trade. But to have de facto "trade restraints" being subject to WTO jurisdiction is quite another, and the two should not be allowed to be confused.

The member states of the WTO should make socio-cultural, environmental, and health & safety matters exempt from its deliberations and jurisdiction.

Yours sincerely,

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