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Sent: Saturday, 10 April 2004 2:25 PM  
To: Committee, Treaties (REPS)  
Subject: Submission to Joint Standing Committee

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14 APR 2004

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from:  
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to:  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
Inquiry into the USFTA

I wish to take up just two areas of the Australia/United States Free Trade Agreement for comment.

1. Medical

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee will be subject under the USFTA to more influence from US drug companies before the products are listed; decisions made by the Advisory Committee not to list some products are then to be reviewed by an "independent" group; prices of items in the the list finally decided on can be increased through allowing an extra opportunity for drug companies to apply for price changes. In this process, the commercial interests of the US drug companies are given greater priority than the Australia public health goal of affordable medicine, an objective not even mentioned.

The Australian public has yet to know the detail of these changes which is still to be developed, a process in which the US will be involved .

A joint medicines working group is to be set up which can influence future policy. One of the principles for this group is to uphold intellectual property rights of drug companies, but again there is no mention of Australian public health goals.

These arrangements create a pressure towards more expensive medicines for Australians, to the detriment particularly of the most underprivileged members of our society.

With regard to blood products, the USFTA appears to go against the finding of the Parliamentary Committee of 2001. This Committee decided that a central supplying entity, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, should be responsible for supplying blood products for reasons of national security and public health. This arrangement will be replaced by a tender process by 2009. Moreover, the suppliers must meet a trade test regarding safety and quality requirements. Safety and quality will now not be allowed to "have the effect of creating unnecessary obstacles to trade" (dispute settlement provisions). Thus the right of Australians to make the decisions that relate to blood products is impaired.

2. Quarantine

The USFTA establishes two committees to deal with quarantine policies and

processes and technical matters. The US as well as Australia is represented on each of these committees. One of the goals is "to facilitate trade" with disputes to be resolved "through mutual consent".

According to Global Trade Watch " the US Government states that food inspection procedures that have posed barriers in the past will be addressed, benefiting sectors such as pork, citrus, apples and stone fruit." If this is the case, the changes are not minor ones. They have the potential for drastically affecting our environment and our farmers.

Australian quarantine decisions, whether regarding GM foods or anything else, need to be made entirely by Australian scientists on biological grounds without reference to trading goals.

Yours sincerely,  
Mrs Jan Tendys