

Dr C J Dahl & Mrs C V Dahl
1 Saville Close
Melba, ACT 2615

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BY:.....

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on US Free Trade Agreement
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Australia/United States Free Trade Agreement (USFTA) - Submission

WE wish to register our concern that the proposed US/Australia Free Trade Agreement, which appears to be being progressed with undue haste, will not be in Australia's best interests.

WE urge that there be much more consultation with the community and with community and business leaders on the details of the proposed Agreement before any further steps are taken to finalise it.

OUR principal concerns are as follows:

1. The Agreement strikes at the heart of Australia's legislative independence. The suggestion that the three tiers of Australian government may all be constrained, or even prevented, from introducing or varying regulations in response to emerging community needs is abhorrent. Australia's independence should not be eroded in any way.
2. It has not been established to our satisfaction that Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme will remain substantially unaltered under the proposed Agreement. Given the contradictory information in the public domain, the Agreement should not be progressed until there has been full disclosure of the implementation details and proper public consultation and debate. Certainly, the US Government (and industry) should not be in a position to dictate Australian domestic policy on the availability and cost of pharmaceuticals.
3. It appears that under the proposed USFTA, Australian content rules for media ownership and programming will be open to challenge and possible easing. The media is already US dominated and any further dilution of Australian content will be severely detrimental to Australian cultural development. If there are to be changes they should be in the opposite direction.

4. The proposed Agreement appears to cede Australia's independence in relation to Foreign Investment Rules, Food Labeling, Quarantine and Trade Practices. This is a further erosion of Australia's independence.

5. The government has not satisfactorily explained the impact of the Agreement on Australian copyright law. It can be interpreted from the proposed Agreement that there will be a detrimental effect on Australian education institutions with schools, libraries, TAFEs and universities incurring higher costs. Such an issue is too important to be left vague - the Agreement should be clearer and consequences clearly spelt out for the community.

General Comment

It is deplorable that endorsement of the Agreement is being pursued without adequate community education and debate on the Agreement's implications. The "catch me if you can" approach relies on members of the community being quick and smart enough to find and highlight the negatives amongst the gloss put out by self interested groups who will benefit under the Agreement. The fact that such an approach is being adopted by the government suggests that, on balance, the Agreement is not in Australia's best interests.

Why would a Government purportedly committed to Australia's best interests, and so ready to attack "un-Australian values", be in such a hurry to give away the farm?

(signed)

Colin J Dahl

Catherine V Dahl