

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TRADE IN
SERVICES AND AUSTRALIA/US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

SUBMISSION

Submission No: 7

Submitters: Mr Alan Miller, Ms Morag Hollway,
Mr Andrew Miller

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No. of Pages: 2

Attachments: No



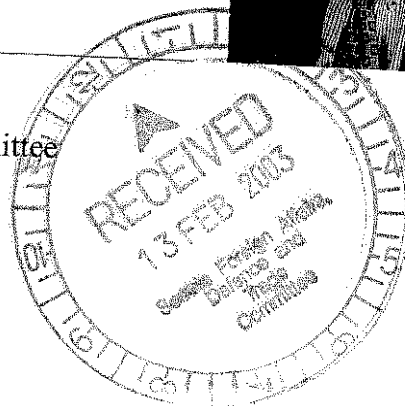
ROBERT McCLELLAND MP

MEMBER FOR BARTON

SHADOW ATTORNEY-GENERAL

SHADOW MINISTER FOR WORKPLACE RELATIONS

The Secretary,
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Suite S1.57
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Holmes,

Please find attached a letter from three of my constituents, Alan Miller, Morag Hollway and Andrew Miller of 9/11 Andover St, Carlton NSW 2218. They have asked that this letter be forwarded on to you as a submission into the Inquiry on the General Agreement on Trade in Services and Australia/US Free Trade Agreement. I hope you will accept it as such.

Yours sincerely,

Robert McClelland MP

MEMBER FOR BARTON

SHADOW ATTORNEY-GENERAL

SHADOW MINISTER FOR WORKPLACE RELATIONS

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10 February 2003

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Mr. Robert McClelland MP
Member for Barton
PO Box 27
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1 January 2003

Dear Mr. McClelland,

* Thank you for encouraging correspondence with your constituents; we enjoy your newsletters very much. We are writing to express our great concern over the terms of negotiation for the free trade agreement with the United States. Among others, there are three areas in which Australia stands to lose out -- the prescription drug benefit, changes to our quarantine laws, and the increased foreign ownership of companies.

After several decades living in the United States, we are grateful to now be living in a country with a universal health care program, and believe that the potential changes to the prescription drug benefits program which might occur under the trade agreement are an unacceptable price to pay. We must not allow the United States government to erode the social programs of which Australians are justifiably proud. From experience we know that the healthcare system in the United States is disastrously unworkable; millions are without insurance, and for the middle class, losing your job means losing your coverage as well. It is a prime example of how inefficient the private sector can be, with redundant bureaucracies performing tasks which should obviously be centralised, while every year premiums go up. American politicians often vilify 'big government,' but few if any have lived in a country with universal health care. The result of the American system is pervasive anxiety and fear from which citizens of this country, and others with universal health care, are blessedly exempt.

Some of the other items under negotiation are equally disturbing. The quarantine laws which have protected our unique ecosystem from so many parasites should under no circumstances be weakened. Our agricultural exports could be irreparably harmed by exposure to weeds, pathogens, and diseases (such as tuberculosis in cattle), from which our quarantine laws have protected us for generations. To have the reputation of our farm products compromised would be both costly and tragic.

Australia's success as a creative economy is well known, and any relaxation of the laws restricting foreign ownership of companies (especially in the media) could have a devastating effect. While free trade has had its successes in various parts of the globe, it must be noted that small countries like Australia stand to lose out when multinationals are allowed untrammelled ownership. Our cultural vibrance -- in film, art, cuisine, music -- is unique in the world, but stands to be damaged if made to compete with the size and pervasiveness of American culture, especially if the free trade agreement reduces the amount of Australian content in programming. The consolidation of media ownership in a few hands results in both a homogenisation of the culture, and more disturbingly, an erosion of the independent, critical viewpoint.

We applaud Labour for setting up an inquiry into the free trade negotiations, but are concerned that the process of negotiating the agreement will not be subject to public scrutiny, and that when the document is signed, we citizens will have given up far too much. We are at a considerable disadvantage when negotiating with a nation as powerful as the United States, and must be willing to walk away from the table when the price of an agreement is too high. In our view the process has already been sullied by the Americans' association of a trade agreement with our two countries' ongoing military alliance. Any negotiations must be undertaken with the greatest scepticism on our part.

Yours Sincerely,


Alan Miller


Morag Hollway


Andrew Miller

P.S. In keeping abreast of the disquieting changes in American society, Paul Krugman's op-ed columns in the *New York Times* (www.nytimes.com) are very good.