

**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:** 137

**Submittor:** National Council of Women of Australia

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**No. of Pages:** 2

**Attachments:** No



# National Council of Women of Australia Inc Ltd

Affiliated with the International Council of Women

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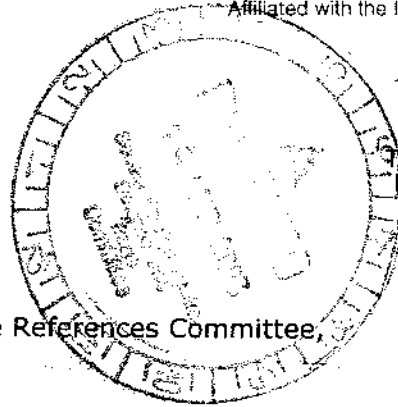
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11 April 2003.

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



Dear Sir/Madam,

### **RE: AUSTRALIA/UNITED STATES PROPOSED FREE TRADE AGREEMENT.**

The National Council of Women (NCWA), is a voluntary organisation working for the advancement of women through a vast network of affiliated organisations and individual members. It is a Peak Women's group that has local organisations in every state, and can claim to have membership of approximately three million women throughout the country. In addition the National Council of Women of Australia is affiliated with an international body, the International Council of Women which enjoys status with the United Nations.

NCWA operates through a series of Standing Committees which include, but is not limited to such areas of interest and concern to women as the Status of Women; Human Rights; Implementation of Conventions; International Relations/ Peace; Legislation; Consumer Affairs; Economics; Rural and Urban Women; Women and Employment; Environment; Habitat; Health; Nutrition; Education; Mass Media; Arts, Letters and Music; Ageing; Child and Family; Migration and Youth.

It will be seen therefore that the organisation is in touch with community attitudes and concerns. One of the issues NCWA has been very heavily involved with is that of genetically engineered/modified foods, in particular the labelling of such products to allow consumers information with which to make an informed choice.

NCWA is not satisfied with the current Food Standard for the labelling of GE foods. It considers that it is weak and does not go far enough in providing consumers with the information studies have shown over and over again they require, ie not the amount of DNA that may or may not be in the finished product, but whether the product has been manufactured using a genetic modification process.

However, notwithstanding the inadequacies of the present standard, there are still advantages for consumers in having it and in fact consumers look forward to seeing the Standard strengthened in line with requirements presently being implemented by the European Union.

Although there are many aspects of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States of America which could impact unfavourably upon consumers, there is little doubt that one will be the issue of the labelling of GE products. As the USA does not require any labelling of food produced using GE techniques, and in fact considers them the same as the non GE product, it will no doubt push to have Australia drop its requirement for any labelling of genetically engineered food or ingredients. This is not acceptable to Australian consumers.

This organisation strongly opposes any Agreement which seeks to lessen the information consumers in Australia have been provided with particularly in regard to the labelling of GE food.

Patron: (Australia) Her Excellency Mrs Ann Hollingworth

President: Mrs Judith A Parker, NCWA Perth Office, PO Box Y3022, East St Georges Terrace, Perth WA 6832  
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We point out there is no call for the production, importation or manufacture of any genetically engineered crop/ product by Australian consumers. There is no evidence either within the farming community that the GE product is preferred over the non GE. There is still a good deal of resistance from many sections of the community regarding genetically engineered crops/products.

Whatever the reasons for consumers reluctance to accept the technology, while this remains the situation, consumers must be provided with the information as to whether or not a product has been produced using gene technology. Only labelling can adequately provide this information.

In addition to expressing our views on the above, NCWA writes to support the submission forwarded earlier by the Gene Ethics Network, which has put the community viewpoint in perspective for the benefit of the committee. We commend their submission to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith A. Parker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Judith Parker  
President NCWA