

**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: 51A

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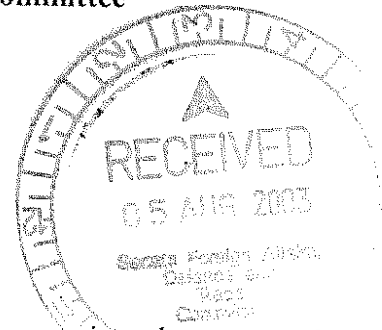
Attachments:

Submission to the

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

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The key points of my submission are that:

1. The economic impacts of trade liberalisation have been consistently overstated. Regional and environmental impacts, in particular, have been understated.
2. That impacts have received inadequate consideration in general due to structural predispositions and flaws in current analysis.
3. That the contributions to national goals from trade are inadequately conceived. Official Commonwealth documents provide evidence of confusions and misrepresentations.
4. That thinking in the lead up to both the Doha Round and US bilateral negotiations appears to be inadequately informed as to the facts of current situations, the possible impacts of posited changes and the potential gains from trade reforms.
5. That in the particular case of agriculture, there has been, at best, widespread confusion as to the sectoral trade situation. More seriously, there appears to be systematic misrepresentation of the agricultural trade situation, with the parliaments, people, enterprises and negotiators of Australia significantly misled.
6. That trade negotiations premised largely upon attainment of access are strategically misconstrued and, with other current facets, damaging to the national interest. Indeed they may be counterproductive and are potentially dangerous.
7. That Australia is currently poorly placed to achieve what potentials there are in current trade negotiations particularly in considerations of development and of the influences of trade on it, as to the realistic prospects from any USFTA, as to the realisable prospects from extending GATS, and in Doha talks.

I am happy to discuss these comments, those on the following pages and otherwise as appropriate.

I would like to wish the Committee and its members every success in their investigations.

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Approach

It is in Australia's national interests that trade and its impacts be more adequately understood than currently appears to be the case. Trade can be part of the strengthening or weakening of a nation.

Trade impacts vary. They can involve extensive contributions to a better world. They can be broken untoward, subservient dependence and resource despoliation. They can influence much else. *Trade impacts* need to be focal in any adequate evaluation of trade liberalisation.

Trade liberalisation is a process which can deliver good and bad. It should be seen as a means towards chosen ends, and evaluated in terms of its ability to so deliver. Currently this is not properly done.

It is incumbent upon those with an interest in Australia and the wellbeing of Australians to determine, as best they might, what the sectoral, particular and net impacts of trade liberalisation programs might be, and have been, *and* whether these are acceptable.

Returns from past liberalisations have been mixed. Those arising from the Uruguay Round reforms have, to date at least, been most limited. They appear well short of what many proponents estimated including some working for the Commonwealth Government.

No adequate analysis has yet appeared of either the impacts of the proposed FTA with the USA or of the impacts likely under any GATS agreement.

Any adequate analysis will need to consider the changed circumstances internationally, of capital and of markets, and of positions towards these. Circumstances today appear far less supportive of success from trade liberalisation than was previously the case.

My Position

The efforts of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee in investigating this difficult area are to be applauded. I hope that this Committee will be able to draw together critical insights and lines of argument in a constructive way.

The Committee and its members are wished every success in their endeavours.

Their task is made difficult by the many limitations in current analysis and policy thinking.

A range of opinions have already been presented to the Committee. It appears that this is the last submission currently scheduled to be heard. I would like to thank the Committee for its invitation and hope to provide a view useful to your endeavours.

By way of introduction, let me state that I am neither "for free trade" nor "for protection". I am for trade that responsibly advances the interests of Australia and Australians. I do feel it is time for proper examination of our current situation, and due consideration of identified problems.

My position is informed academically by doctoral research into impact analysis, by masters research into regional development and by undergraduate studies in science and economics. My position is informed practically by professional and personal experiences over thirty years, particularly while working with those from rural sectors and regions. My professional experiences include fourteen years at QUT lecturing in such things as Industry Analysis, Business in Europe, and Economics at all levels. I am currently in QUT's School of International Business.

Findings

Paraphrasing, in meeting its terms of references and potentially expanding upon them, the Committee has been directed towards

- A. considerations of impacts (economic, regional, social, cultural, environmental, policy; on public services, regulation and assets)
- B. under alternative potential "trade" regimes (associated with USFTA, GATS, Doha)
- C. having particular regard to Australia's goals, strategy and processes (broadly, in negotiation, and potentially).

This submission particularly seeks to inform the Committee:

- A. that impacts have been, at best, only partially considered. Impact analysis is inadequate.
- B. that potential gains and losses under alternative regimes do not appear to have been estimated in any satisfactory way. Regime analysis is inadequate.
- C. that Australia's goals, strategies and processes appear confused. Negotiations are then likely to be less effective than they might be. Indeed, achievable outcomes could be disadvantageous to the interests of Australia and Australians.

The key points on the pages following provide detailed support for these findings.

Current limitations to understanding are many. Well-founded policy will need to recognise not only the limitations but also their implications. Third party and like influences need particular recognition. This is true not only in Australia but also internationally. More positively, sound prospects do appear in some areas. The key policy challenge will be to sustainably advance these while having due regard to the various interests of Australia and Australians.

Neither the GATS extensions nor a FTA with the USA nor any Doha agreement as these are apparently currently proposed appear to be part of such a sustainable advance. Indeed, and given these times of relative international uncertainty and insecurity, GATS extensions or USFTA agreements could materially reduce the ability of Australia, the USA and their various allies to achieve their strategic and other objectives.

Framing trade, and advancing the debate

More broadly, trade considerations appear poorly conceived and inadequately framed. The points made can be variously appraised and used (as the examples indicate):

- I. Theoretically, to indicate, for example, how limited the currently used theory is.
- II. Conceptually, to illustrate how narrowly focussed and constrained much analysis is.
- III. Empirically, to detail the trading (and deteriorating net) positions of many export sectors (particularly agriculture) and, on international measures, the Australian economy itself.
- IV. Practically, to highlight the practices of various trading parties, and the apparently relatively careless positions proposed and adopted in Australia.
- V. Morally and politically, to indicate the alternative value sets and assumptions that underlie alternative positions.
- VI. Propositionally, to indicate the trade-offs that could be involved in any USFTA, GATS or Doha Round sponsored trade liberalisations, and by investigating alternative ways.

Emphasis is on the first three of these, as befits my professional position. Other parties will use other mixes as is relevant to them. A fuller development of this framework can be provided upon request. A more adequate trade policy could be developed and articulated within such a framework. Some such articulation will be needed if there is to be effective communication about, and understanding of, trade impacts and the true potentials of trade and liberalisation.

The essential question in all three current trade dialogues is whether and specifically how Australia and Australians would be better off from further agreements on trade liberalisation.

Submission Key Points 1 to 7, as detailed

The key points made in my earlier submission have been extended through a series of subsidiary points.

- 1. The economic impacts of trade liberalisation have been consistently overstated. Regional and environmental impacts, in particular, have been understated.**

That is, currently used impact analysis is inadequate and biased in various ways.

For example:

- a. The emphasis in trade liberalisation discussions is on movements in the market, typically centred on supposedly advantageous movements in price and their presumed transmissions.
- b. Such a formulation is limited in its consideration of interactions within a market. It involves a limited stylisation of economic life, and of life more broadly.
- c. As well, it essentially excludes consideration of wider effects unless these are somehow coupled to the market mechanism used.
- d. When national markets are assumed, regional effects are necessarily derived outcomes. Disaggregation problems and issues of bias appear largely unrecognised.
- e. Empirical analysis of trade liberalisation has been largely based on propositions, particularly those associated with General Equilibrium (GE) theory.
- f. GE theory as originally proposed by Walras could operate “successfully” only with five sets of assumptions which restricted market “misadventures”. These five sets of restrictions (on such things as speculation and minimum wage rates) have been removed under modern “market reforms” allowing dysfunctional markets and inappropriate equilibria to emerge.
- g. GATS extensions in particular would potentially advance dysfunction and compound existing problems. Impact sensitivities need due consideration.
- h. *Ex post* analysis of actual effects of trade liberalisation is limited.
- i. However NAFTA, New Zealand and EU experiences illustrate the “richness” of problems that can arise. This is not to say, liberalisation effects cannot be good but rather to say they are often, at best, mixed.
- j. There are clear grounds for anticipating problems and formulating policies to deal with these in advance of any agreement. This does not appear to have been done either as part of any negotiation analysis or strategic policy thinking.
- k. An obvious area of likely serious conflict that would follow any GATS extensions and a USFTA in particular is in the institutional area. Institutional impacts should also be considered by the Committee.

- 2. That impacts have received inadequate consideration in general due to structural predispositions and flaws in current analysis.**

Current economic and related analysis is predisposed to deliver failure in practice despite “rosy results” in the modelling.

- a. Trade is typically represented as a positive-sum and each-must-win game. Naïve arguments based on comparative advantage theory are of this sort.

- b. Important economic issues (including such basic considerations as returns on investment and the existence of alternative business contexts) are systematically overlooked as they do not fit in the modelling frame.
- c. Economic issues are granted primacy in considerations with social cohesion, environmental quality, regional balance and the like simply assumed.
- d. Compounding this is a spurious assumption of common interests and a lack of consideration of such things as market power, corporate strategy and states of development.
- e. Liberalisation argued through such partial considerations have already lead to
- f. Changes in the international environment (including current capacity oversupply, international debt stress and rising protectionist sentiments and practices) make it less supportive of success from trade reform.
- g. Further, diminishing returns appear to have set in for “trade liberalisation” which is now a very old and largely exhausted (at least in terms of its current economic potential) agenda item, especially when compared to considerations of “development”.

Building from points 1e) and f)

- h. More adequate approaches and models than those currently favoured are needed. In particular the limitations associated with General Equilibrium thinking need critical appreciation.
- i. The limitations of the associated and very naïve view of competitiveness need to be critically appreciated. More adequate views (and tools) are needed.
- j. Empirical results from CGE modelling (such as used by the CIE for DFAT) are highly susceptible to assumptions made and sensitivities need to be explored.

3. That the contributions to national goals from trade are inadequately conceived. Official Commonwealth documents provide evidence of confusions and misrepresentations.

“Our” thinking on trade is confused and muddled.

- a. “Trade” is more than “exports”, something DFAT in particular seems to have trouble acknowledging. This can be seen in Appendix 2 of the markedly limited and confused 2003 white paper “Advancing the National Interest”, for example.
- b. Australia’s net trade position is poor and this needs to be recognised. Representing sectors in terms of their net position (preferably on both current and capital accounts) rather than in terms of exports only reveals a markedly different story.
- c. Reliance upon representations of sectors based upon exports only is likely to mislead those in the sector, policy makers and the wider Australian community.
- d. Australia is typically around the 15th (to 20th) largest product market globally. It is one of the few large markets not currently encumbered with trade agreements and it currently offers few protective barriers.
- e. An implicit identity appears assumed: “trade = growth = good”.
- f. Thus greater trade access (as a result of liberalisation, any liberalisation?) is assumed to result in more growth.
- g. The difference between access and profitability seems little recognised, including by negotiators. Access to end markets may be obtained under conditions so

unfavourable as to make any market involvement unprofitable for one or more parties along a supply chain.

- h. Such conditions exist in many markets already accessible today, both within Australia and internationally. They often have little to do with the usual concerns such as tariffs and rather reflect corporate positionings and use of market powers.
- i. While national regimes currently deal with such things with varying degrees of success, internationally there are no adequate arrangements, instruments or institutions to deal with such things or with incompatibilities between regimes.
- j. In particular there are some basic incompatibilities between the (regulatory and other) regimes of Australia and the USA. Some sectors (eg agriculture) and things such as bankruptcy are treated in markedly different ways.
- k. Any trade between parties subject to such regime differences would be carried out on unequal grounds, with “interesting” results. How, for example, Australian farmers are to compete with US farmers enjoying 50% income subsidies, and how this has or has not been modelled, are not at all clear.
- l. Any results achieved from liberalising trade would then reflect any regime-based advantages and corporate positionings as well as individual enterprise and product characteristics.

Further

- m. National goals are largely cast in economic terms. This in itself is a limitation, one compounded when a narrow view of economics is adopted.
- n. The “growth through trade expansion” model is only one of a number of alternatives. Others would include economic growth through resource development (including human resources), entrepreneurial activities and/or technological innovation.
- o. The limitations of current measures of growth, such as GDP, and of growth itself are well recognised in economics but not, apparently, in national policy.
- p. Growth is different to development. The former is a change in quantity of some given quality; the latter involves change(s) in either or both. Effective development need not be achieved through the pursuit of growth.
- q. The central policy issue would seem to be the “proper” development of Australia and Australians, proper being something “democratically” determined by citizens through their governments and various representatives.
- r. Policy development processes have traditionally been carried out in ways accountable to the Australian people and their parliaments. Accountability issues under more liberalised regimes appear essentially unaddressed.
- s. The compatibility of general equilibrium thinking with the development of totalitarian states has been recognised in the economics literature.
- t. The accountability and relative competitiveness of organisations and corporations operating under different regimes needs clear and more adequate consideration.
- u. Particularly needing attention are situations involving organisations with limited liabilities (which can be used for limiting responsibilities) or significant subsidies (which enhance competitiveness on “non-earned” grounds). The rentier and the recklessly opportunistic need careful handling, in analysis, policy and practice.

4. That thinking in the lead up to both the Doha Round and US bilateral negotiations appears to be inadequately informed as to the facts of current situations, the possible impacts of posited changes and the potential gains from trade reforms.

Realistic appraisals of achievable gains from further trade liberalisation appear absent. Naïve adventurism appears preferred to critically informed consideration.

- a. Whatever happened to APEC, and its emphasis on open regionalism? A critical review of APEC and its stalled development would provide one basis for understanding present prospects.
- b. If open regionalism is passé, then is bilateralism a closed regionalism? The potentially protectionist stance that Australia would adopt in moving to a USFTA needs to be recognised.
- c. How such a move would be interpreted by major trading partners in Asia and Europe needs careful consideration. Given recent comments by EU officials, there does appear to be some concern.
- d. Potential reactions by trading partners to a USFTA need explicit consideration and robust analysis, including at the sectoral level. Such considerations would be essential to any effective strategy; compatible tactics could then be discerned.
- e. Unfortunately Australia does not appear to have a coherent trade strategy.
- f. Current positions need to be critically assessed. “Liberalise or perish!” may be an oversimplification but such a sentiment seems does to drive current negotiations.
- g. International developments that need to be considered include the changing nature and extent of trade disputes, sanctions and regimes. To talk of “free trade” is, at best, careless when all manner of arrangements (and the WTO) exist.
- h. A major problem is the incremental development of Doha and GATS positions without any clear strategic framework. “Uruguay good, Doha better” (and “more GATS best”?) is something expected in Orwell’s “*Animal Farm*”. It is grossly inadequate as a basis in something as important as trade development.
- i. A strategic framework would, to me, properly begin with clear articulation of objectives and recognition of interests. It would have commercial, sectoral and public input. While Australia may have got by with less in the past, current international trends (particularly the use of retaliatory or punitive sanctions) make this a potentially dangerous practice.
- j. International demographics and associated potential demand developments would properly be part of strategic thinking.
- k. The distinct and developing interests of the various regions in the world need clearer articulation and more careful consideration. Of particular interest to Australia from a trade perspective are supra-national regional developments in North America (with potentially South), the EU (particularly after enlargements, agreed and proposed) and Asia (as emerging).
- l. Current apparently-limited considerations, as evident in “*Advancing the National Interest*”, need to be markedly advanced beyond simple description. Issues such as potential TAs with Japan, China and Korea need more than passing mention.
- m. In particular need of review is the position that “the Government will pursue wider trade and economic agreements that facilitate higher flows of trade and investment” (DFAT 2003, p xiv). That this is an appropriate tactic in today’s world needs to be critically established.

- n. Indeed the whole concept of a FTA needs clarification. It appears that alternative interpretations exist and these are confusing dialogue and debate.
- o. Recognition of Australia's distinct interests needs to be explicit. "Australian interests" seems a catch-all to DFAT, for example. Its use varies in *"Advancing the National Interest"*, with confusion between processes and interests evident in Appendix 3.
- p. Successful negotiations advance selected interests. Which interests in particular are being advanced, or are to be advanced, and how, in each of the FTA (and TA), Doha, and GATS proposals, and how will these cohere?
- q. There is a danger of simple mistakes (including in oversight) and also of strategic blunders when overall gains are simply presumed and implicit. Fragmented thinking leading to uncoordinated actions can be countered to at least some extent through clear expression of interest.
- r. The USA, in particular, is a very focussed negotiator. Typically it identified its interests fairly clearly. It adopts a variety of tactics to deliver strategic and operational advantages to its national, commercial and other operative interests.
- s. As an example, experiences in Canada in NAFTA negotiations and subsequently demonstrate some of the problems that arise in FTA negotiations and implementation.
- t. Australian negotiators do face a difficult and complex task in trade liberalisation talks. It seems that we are not positioning them as best we might to achieve outcomes consistent with the particular and overall interests of Australia and Australians. They deserve better support, including from a more adequate framework. Australian interests deserve better articulation.
- u. A FTA agreement is an economically unstable arrangement, one often seen as a step towards closer involvement and union. Is this an agreed policy direction?

5. That in the particular case of agriculture, there has been, at best, widespread confusion as to the sectoral trade situation. More seriously, there appears to be systematic misrepresentation of the agricultural trade situation, with the parliaments, people, enterprises and negotiators of Australia significantly misled.

Sectoral situations and interests are not properly discerned with consequent mistakes being likely.

- a. Australia is a major exporter of Agricultural products. It is currently also a small importer.
- b. The proportion of production allocated to exports varies from industry sector to sector. For example, wool and wheat exports were around 70% of production while poultry and egg exports were nil or 0% in 1993-94 (ABS 5215, and McGovern 1999a: Table 4).
- c. Direct exports as a proportion of overall production from agriculture was 22% in 1993-94.
- d. Net *direct* agricultural exports were 0.19 or 19% in 1993-94.
- e. The above points appear undisputed.
- f. Since 1996 there has been considerable dispute about the "overall" level of exports from agriculture.

- g. The key point of difference centres on the treatment of processed products with on-farm origins.
- h. Two approaches have been discerned:
 - i. ***the consistent approach***: the value of exports are compared with that of production for the sector of dispatch. For example, in the sugar sectors, (fresh cut) "sugar cane" exports are zero. "Raw sugar" exports are compared with the total value of raw sugar sector production (measured at mill despatch gate) with 63% of raw sugar production then being counted as exports for 1993-94.
 - ii. ***the conventional approach***: the value of exports from one (processing) sector are compared with those from a source (farm) sector. For example, "raw sugar" production is compared with the total value of farm "sugar cane" production. For 1993-94, \$1053m raw sugar exports are compared with total sugar cane production of \$943m to yield an export proportion of 1.12. That is, 112% of production is said to be exported, a clearly fanciful result.
- i. The consistent approach has been put and further argued in McGovern (1999a, 1999b, 2001 and forthcoming). The first is the only know work, so far, subject to independent refereeing and academic journal publication. It has not been challenged to my knowledge in the academic literature.
- j. The second approach is the "conventional" position, one argued by a number of Commonwealth agencies (principally ABARE and DFAT). The conventional position appears to have informed trade liberalisation thinking since the 1990s, but not in the early 1980s when thinking was apparently informed by the consistent position.
- k. A number of important considerations arise.
 - i. There is dispute about the importance of exports in agriculture.
 - ii. The consistent position estimates as published are that in total around *a quarter* of agricultural production is exported (whether raw or processed) while conventional estimates range around *two thirds* (and have been as high as 80%).
 - iii. There are markedly different implications for trade negotiations from these alternative positions (as discussed in McGovern 1999b).
 - iv. Negotiations appear to have been from a conventional position, a flawed basis. The conventional position has been put in a number of governmental publications and other places yet its basis is unclear and appears confused.
 - v. This confusion is reflected elsewhere in government, including in its policy directions.
 - vi. The consistent position stands unchallenged in the academic literature.
 - vii. Works in progress further reinforce the consistent position.
 - viii. No refutation of the consistent position has been put, despite considerable engagement by myself and others as well as ample time now elapsing for such a case to be made. Since the consistent position is consistent with standard and internationally agreed procedures, no successful refutation is expected.

- ix. Commonwealth agencies have apparently moved from a consistent to a conventional position during the 1980s, the basis of this move being unclear.
- x. Some retained by government have claimed that such empirical issues don't matter. Such positions need critical review.
- l. The wider economic circumstances of the agricultural sector and rural regions also warrant careful scrutiny, as does the advice given (particularly as regards investment).
- m. A number of adverse effects and untoward impacts, apparently from prior trade liberalisations and other initiatives, can be seen.
- n. The Commonwealth has had a material influence in a number of these. It may be well advised to consider its position and potential liabilities.

6. That trade negotiations premised largely upon attainment of access are strategically misconstrued and, with other current facets, damaging to the national interest. Indeed they may be counterproductive and are potentially dangerous.

Thus current approaches are inadequate being conceptually and practically flawed.

- a. Key differences between access and profitability - as goals, of any interrelationships and of ways to achieve these - appear largely unrecognised.
- b. Compounding problems are the clear confusion and untenable positions adopted at the Commonwealth level, particularly as regards agriculture.
- c. Under situations of relative oversupply and substantial production subsidisation, targeted market strategies can be expected from trading partners, and are evident at both national and corporate levels.
- d. Short term behaviours which might be opportunistically profitable for some parties both overseas and in Australia can damage the interests of other parties, again both in Australia and overseas.
- e. Impacts on particular interests need to be discerned and the acceptability of such impacts decided upon. Cavalier disregard (including through "education" to see the purported real benefits!) is an inadequate and irresponsible response.
- f. Given current international tensions and geopolitical trends (including trade disputes and returns to subsidisation in advanced countries), Australia appears well advised to consider any further trade liberalisation very carefully, particularly as it affects national positioning and economic capability.
- g. Considered in US Dollar terms, the Australian economy has grown little over recent years. While we may see ourselves as economically successful in terms of our own currency, the relative position of Australia has deteriorated.
- h. We need to move beyond such narrow perspectives, not only in considerations of trade but also more generally. Dangers could arise from unappreciated problems consequent on an inappropriately narrow viewpoint.
- i. Rather than pursue zealous FTA endeavours, more may be gained from posing more realistic questions and a more adequate appreciation of relative interests.

The prior points lead to this general conclusion.

7. That Australia is currently poorly placed to achieve what potentials there are in current trade negotiations

- particularly in considerations of development and of the influences of trade on it,
- particularly as to the realistic prospects from any USFTA,
- particularly as to the realisable prospects from extending GATS, and
- particularly in Doha talks.

Australia has, unfortunately, achieved a position of weakness, one from which it has limited understanding of, and reduced ability to advance, its interests. A fundamental failing has been not to recognise changing opportunities, circumstances and times, and to adapt to these. Time and timing matter. While the trade liberalisation journey as begun may have been a good one, it is the journeys presently and tomorrow that now matter.

In Summary

No adequate basis currently appears to exist for responsible trade liberalisation. No clear case is made.

To proceed from the current basis without at least serious reflection and preferably re-evaluation would appear to be foolishness in the extreme.

Impacts consequent from trade and any further liberalisation need to be evaluated not only sectorally, governmentally and corporately but also as regards our trade and wider prospects with the Americas, Europe and Asia.

Trade is a tool, one potential means to advance various ends. Trade initiatives need to be well positioned amongst other initiatives undertaken by the governments, businesses and peoples of Australia if desired goals are to be achievable.

Towards this end, a number of suggestions can be made. They include these actions:

1. a much more adequate *investigation* into the current situations of Australian sectors and interests, and how these may be impacted under alternative reforms (including possible trade liberalisations).
2. responsible, penetrating *inquiry* into the situations of Australian agriculture (in particular the understanding of sectoral exports) and how such things have arisen.
3. *articulation* of the various links between trade and development, and of the balances between these under current and potential trading conditions
4. institutional and other *developments* to allow various and informed view points to be more effectively put and incorporated into national and international dialogues.

It is respectfully suggested that the Committee develop and release a draft position paper and a work program to help focus and stimulate dialogues in this important area. Further technical discussions as appropriate and constructive engagement, including from academics, are also encouraged. I would be very willing to engage actively in these as appropriate.

Mark McGovern July 24th 2003