

**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: 85

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SUBMISSION:

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TRADE IN SERVICES AND AUSTRALIA/US
FREE TRADE AGREEMENT.

TO:

THE SECRETARY
SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE
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FROM:

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SUBMISSION OF P.C. AND D.C. HEGERTY:GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TRADE IN SERVICES AND AUSTRALIA/US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT.INTRODUCTION:

We are private citizens of Australia who have become very concerned about the World Trade Organisation. This Organisation makes decisions on a global level that have a direct impact on the lives of all of us.

THE WTO AND GATS:

At present one particular area of emphasis for the WTO is to liberalise the Trade in Services (including services such as health, education, water sources and supply - to name a few) via negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The current GATS negotiations aim to remove or minimise so-called "barriers" to trade in services.

A worrying aspect in all this is that it would seem that -

- (a) WTO processes are not adequately open to scrutiny;
- (b) there is a lack of accountability for decisions taken;
- (c) in the free trade environment there is a small number of "big winners" and a very large number of "big losers", especially among developing Nations;
- (d) we are a democracy but our actual ability to act through our Government is significantly diminished when the Government of the day signs away our freedom of action little by little, and often unwittingly, through far reaching multilateral trade treaties.

In spite of our youth as a Nation that has progressed well, we are still a small country on the world stage but as citizens we have the right to protect our independence which was earned by the efforts of the ordinary every day Australian and not the International Corporations who wish to use us for profit.

Under the proposed GATS regime, foreign for-profit health and education corporations will have the right in any WTO country to compete for public dollars with public institutions like hospitals and schools. This would mean a drop in our standards as no Government could fund their own services as well as any foreign-based corporations that claim equal rights to that money. We could therefore see a decline in our quality of life, particularly for the poor.

PRIVATISING WATER SOURCES:

We believe that the Australian Government has supported the inclusion of "water" in the GATS. Under GATS local public utilities could find themselves pushed aside by much bigger for-profit corporations that specialise in water treatment and delivery. In a dry country like Australia our water is too precious to be used as a tool for profit.

Society should function in a way that is respectful to all the people in that society, treating them with dignity no matter what their station in life. The fruits of this world are meant for all. PEOPLE'S RIGHTS ARE BEING STRIPPED FROM THEM. People in a democracy are entitled to information that affects their lives. This is not being done.

SUBMISSION OF P.C. AND D.C. HEGERTY. (CONT.)

People are increasingly expressing concern about the privatisation of National assets and the growing power of multinational companies through globalisation. Our leaders are not our masters; they were elected to safeguard our interests and not to sign away our heritage.

Before we sign any more Treaties the full information should be thrown into the public arena to enable the citizens of this country to debate the issues.

PROPOSED AUSTRALIA/US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT:

The level of knowledge about Trade Agreements within the Australian community is very inadequate. This applies not only to the community at large but also to our elected representatives at all levels of government. If these trade agreements are so beneficial to our Nation, why are the facts difficult to obtain and public debate being discouraged?

What sort of transparency can we expect in the Australian/US negotiations? Will the public and the Parliament be kept fully informed at every stage of the negotiations? Will there be full Parliamentary debate before any agreement is signed?

It might be worth considering the following -

- * A Free Trade Agreement for the United States is a much less significant National economic decision than for Australia.
- * Do we wish to be reduced to the status of just another State of the US?
- * That security and trade issues are being linked.
- * It will damage our relationship with countries in our region if we are seen as representing the US in the Pacific.
- * It could be seen as the "reward" to Australia for the Prime Minister's strong support on terrorism and the war on Iraq.
- * Claimed economic gains to Australia would be minimal even if all barriers to trade were removed.
- * The area of agriculture is one in which we are interested - America has a very powerful farm lobby and the US government has made it clear that it intends to protect its farmers from International competition.
- * That our strict labelling requirements for all Genetically Modified food could be challenged.
- * Will Australia have to reduce its quarantine standards?

In Australia, from time to time, we suffer from drought and the degradation of our best farm land. This has to be taken into consideration.

We are definitely opposed to any Australian/US Free Trade Agreement. Unfortunately we seem to suffer a grand delusion, in some circles, with regard to our place on the world stage - hasn't our Prime Minister been there lately? It would be advantageous for those wishing to enter into this Agreement to listen to the intelligent opinions of those in our community who have the qualifications to form sound opinions on these matters. We feel that the cost to our Nation, if we sign this Agreement, will far outweigh the benefits.

SUBMISSION OF P.C. AND D.C. HEGERTY. (CONT.)

We forward this submission because we are concerned citizens who believe that, if Australia enters into a Free Trade Agreement with the United States of America, we are not acting in the best interests of Australia, our citizens and our future generations.

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