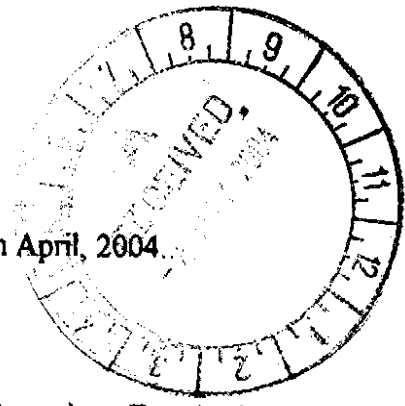


BY FACSIMILE - 02 62 77 3830

FOR ATTENTION:

Secretary, Senate Select Committee on a Free Trade Agreement  
between Australia and United States of America,  
Parliament House, Canberra. A.C.T.

30th April, 2004.



The following submission is forwarded in response to the Senate Committee Enquiry into the Australia-United States of America Free Trade Agreement.

To begin with, I reject the notion that this is a Free Trade Agreement. It should be more correctly termed a Selective Trade Agreement between two countries, one of which is larger and more powerful than the other and has managed to exact more concessions than it has given. Any perceived gain for Australia is negligible and will be greatly outweighed by what has been given away.

During the week following conclusion of the free trade agreement negotiations, it was publicly reported that members of Australia's experienced trade advisory team assisting Trade Minister Mr. Mark Vaile had cautioned him about signing up to the agreement as they believed it not to be in Australia's best interest to do so. It therefore has to be assumed that Mr. Vaile ignored expert advice given and went ahead because of senior government pressure to return to Australia with a free trade deal regardless of what concessions had to be made.

In the area of **Agriculture** the phasing in of concessions over 18 years is most unrealistic and is of no current benefit to the **beef and dairy industry**. Over that time, many present farmers will be gone, world markets will have changed, political power bases will no doubt have altered and agreements of this kind may not even be adhered to, so it is ridiculous to forecast big dollar values when the world economy could be operating very differently to what is currently accepted. The Americans are certainly not going to have to wait that long for their benefits which are set to operate as soon as the trade agreement is approved. I find it a matter of very serious concern that Australian negotiators would not recognise these weaknesses in what has been agreed upon.

Although the U.S. have insisted on the sale of Telstra, this should not be part of the deal because this is still an ongoing issue under debate in the Australian parliament. Our national **Telecommunications** system must remain in full Australian ownership and its control should not be taken over by foreign companies. Also, it is vital for Australian essential services such as **health, education, postal, energy, water and environmental services** to remain under Australian control. The provisions of the trade agreement will result in the *gradual privatisation and sell off of these essential services to international ownership.*

There is no doubt that Australians will be faced with higher cost for medicines under the trade agreement which will allow international drug companies to query our **Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme**. Even with the PBS, prescribed medication is costly for working Australians. The aim should be affordable medicine for every Australian, not profit for international drug companies.

Despite claims to the contrary by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry it is very evident that Biosecurity Australia have been compromised by this trade agreement as they promptly released revised reports recommending the import of pork, bananas and apples, all of which had been under **quarantine** scrutiny because of high risk of diseased produce being introduced into Australia. **Quarantine** and trade are separate issues and the U.S. attempt to reduce Australia's **quarantine** protection to allow entry of infected produce is reprehensible and destructive. Our **quarantine** regulations and laws must not be relaxed on the basis of free trade considerations. There is no gain for Australia in this area, only disastrous consequences for Australian pork producers, our clean, disease free horticulture and fruit growing industry and banana growing industry. There is much greater national value in retaining Australia's present status as a source of high quality, disease free produce.

In this trade agreement, the U.S. will expect to restrict or remove **Australian food labelling laws** which will force the acceptance and distribution of **genetically engineered or modified food** product and greatly restrict the choice of Australian consumers who do not want GE or GM food. It is vital that our **current food labelling laws** remain intact and not be subject to interference by the U.S. or any other country or member of the World Trade Organisation.

The important cultural issue of **Australian content in new media** requires particular scrutiny. There is an already existing overload of American cultural content in film and visual media in Australia. The trade agreement will allow U.S. content to expand and possibly extend into public broadcasting. The livelihood of Australians employed in the arts, media, entertainment and public broadcasting industry will be seriously undermined by such expansion. Australians have the right to choose to see and hear their own culturally based programs presented by Australian broadcasters, performers and entertainers. Trade agreement restrictions on future governments regarding **local Australian content** is totally unacceptable.

In summary, the free trade negotiations with U.S.A. were a failure for Australia. Giving way on such vital and major national areas such as telecommunication, media and broadcasting, health and medicines, quarantine and environment plus G.M.O. policy in order to derive some possible future gain for primary producers and nothing for sugar farmers really is a pretty worthless exchange. As a taxpaying Australian citizen, I totally oppose Australia's participation in this unequal trade agreement with the United States of America.

It is arrogance in the extreme for the Australian Prime Minister to travel to the U.S. to sign the trade agreement while it is still under scrutiny of the Senate Enquiry and has not yet received endorsement by the Australian parliament. The due process of assessment and scrutiny should be carried out correctly and without haste and I urge the Senate Committee not to be put under pressure by political events in the U.S.A.

*J. O'Connor*

3/05/04

From: Mrs. G. O'Connor,