

Thank you for this opportunity to express my concerns about the proposed US-Australian Free Trade Agreement, USAFTA. My main objections to the Agreement are concerns about the loss of Australian sovereignty and the cultural, environmental and social impact of the Agreement.

The USAFTA is really an agreement in trade and services. Australia has concentrated its negotiations on our relatively small agricultural export trade to the US. The US has maintained its protectionist policy on trade by imposing long periods before tariffs are removed, 18 years for beef and dairy products, and imposing safeguards, while actively negotiating concessions over our service sector.

Australia already has a General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs GATT. Surely it is under this Agreement that Australia should be seeking to have the US reduce its tariffs and subsidies against our exports. Australia has done far more in reducing tariffs than the US. The US has breached its obligations under GATT and Australia has been powerless to remedy these breaches. Will this new USAFTA be any different?

Australia may run the risk of being forced to trade more with the US to the detriment of other trading partners, especially if we desire to meet the "rules of origin" requirement for exported manufactured goods to the US.

There is little to be gained by this Agreement but much to be forfeited.

1. Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. PBS.

The PBS should not be weakened further. Pharmaceutical companies can, under existing rules, resubmit their product if not satisfied with the ruling of the PBS committee and process errors can be challenged in the federal court. That's pretty "transparent and accountable". Who would choose this "independent review" panel, how public would its hearings be and if it cannot overturn the Committee's decision what is its actual purpose? Changes, which give pharmaceutical companies more means of applying pressure on the PBS are unwarranted and will cost the taxpayer more, even if the price over the counter is not increased. Changes to the PBS should be rejected.

2. Quarantine

Australian's quarantine system should not be compromised with the inclusion of a trade representative. This is a

scientific body charged with the responsibility of preventing exotic diseases entering Australia and containing them if they should occur. Surely it is in Australia's best interest, even for trade, to remain as disease free as we are.

3. Media: local content and copyright

One of the most disturbing features is that of local content. It is completely unacceptable that should a government reduce the local content quota it cannot be raised at a later date. The government should control the amount of local content in free to air TV but also pay TV, radio and other forms of new media where this is desirable to preserve our culture. This is not the domain of the US. Our government should not have to consult with any other country when deciding what local content quota we require or prefer. Australian content is vital in film, drama, comedy, educational and children's programs and documentaries. This is how we retain our identity and can be proud of our people, our culture, our quirky originality, our humour and our inventiveness.

Recently a Government committee recommended against extending copyright terms in Australia. Yet now, without any independent inquiry about costs or benefits to Australia, especially educational institutions including libraries, the Australian Government has decided to follow the US and extend copyright by twenty years. Who does this benefit?

4. Compensation.

American corporations must not have more control than the Australian government over public policy in Australia. The USAFTA must not include a North American Free Trade Agreement type investment chapter where American corporations could sue an Australian state or federal government if it legislates to protect the public interest.

A tribunal where the judges are selected by the parties concerned, hearings are not public and where there is no recourse for appeal is also unacceptable.

Other possible concerns are:

1. Foreign Investment Review Board. This Board should retain the powers it has in reviewing and deciding on foreign investment in Australia.
2. Genetically Modified products. The already limited labelling of GM products should not be reduced. The Australian governments should control whether GM crops are produced in Australia. If we wish to strengthen legislation on GM products we should be able to.

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