Doctors for the Environment Australia

Promoting health through care of the Environment

A branch of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment

The Secretary,
The Senate Select Committee on the USFTA,
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT 2600.

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Dear Secretary,
Doctors for the Environment Australia opposes ratification of the USFTA on the basis that appropriate assessments have not been made on its environmental effects. In a world of interdependence of all peoples it is essential to assess impacts, not only on Australia and the USA but on the entire world community.

Doctors for the Environment Australia also has concerns for the proper management of genetically modified foods.

Doctors for the Environment Australia has an educative role to explain the relationships between ill health and damage to the natural environment. Our opinions are scientifically based and we are fortunate to have the support of some of Australia's most eminent scientists. These include Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal, Professor Fiona Stanley, Australian of the year 2003, Professor Frank Fenner of smallpox vaccine fame and Professor Tony McMichael of ANU who is a lead author on the health aspects of climate change with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Is the USFTA an environmentally sustainable development?

Doctors for the Environment. Australia recognises that by the end of the 1990s, humanity's demand for biological resources had exceeded by 20% the earth's capacity to sustain them. This is resulting in an accelerated loss of land and ecological services, pollution and inevitable climate change, all of which have profound health implications. For this reason, thousands of scientists worldwide agree on evidence that suggests that humanity has perhaps one or two generations to act in order to avoid global ecological catastrophe. These are the majority of Nobel Prize winners, and scientists of the US Academy and Royal Societies in the UK. Sir David King, chief scientist of the UK government, states "In my view, climate change is the most severe problem that we are facing today, more serious than the threat of terrorism." And this is but one of several demanding problems.

For these reasons there is a compelling need to examine every economic decision for its environmental impacts and to ask if it is sustainable. In practice, every market has consequences beyond the participants. Consequences have been called 'externalities' by economists indicating that, conveniently, they do not fit into economic theory! Externalities, such as the cost of pollution, are usually carried by the general community, now, or in the case of greenhouse emissions, by future generations. Examples of possible externalities that have not been studied and costed in the USFTA are effects on major ecosystems in other countries (for example globally the beef trade is responsible for ongoing destruction of Amazon rainforest which is essential for climatic stability. Therefore the beef trade must be viewed globally and not

bilaterally), potential increase in soil deterioration in Australia in order to increase exports, and the true production and transport costs in agricultural trades

Let us briefly consider some of these issues. In terms of the externality, fossil fuel consumption, part of which will produce greenhouse emissions, in the USA 400 gallons of oil equivalents are used to feed each American each year. The breakdown is:-
Manufacture of inorganic fertiliser 31%
Operation of field machinery 19%
Transportation 16%
Irrigation 13%
Others 21%

In the interest of sustainability, these calculations should be made available for Australian agricultural production, to determine which country is the most energy efficient. If Australia is the more efficient, then we must determine if it is still advantageous to export produce to the USA when the externality of the greenhouse costs of transport are taken into account.

If the analysis still favours Australian production then further sustainability criteria must be analysed For example, taking into account the stability of soils and the availability of water resources, in which of the two countries is dairy production most environmentally sustainable?

In conclusion the point should be made that above a certain modest income there is no correlation between wealth and human health and well being. Yet here are two wealthy countries pursuing a trade agreement with the intent of enriching themselves further, without considering the health impacts of the proposal on their own populations and more importantly upon those in less fortunate countries. We would wish the Senate committee to recognise that the time has come to institute measures to assess all such agreements in detail as argued above and also in terms of ecological footprint.

We are compelled to say that the thinking behind this trade agreement belongs to the 20th century. We need 21st century thinking if we are to mitigate the impending problems. We suggest that no major economic treaty should be signed unless it provides a reduction in the economic footprint of the two nations and unless it addresses the disparity in footprint between rich and developing countries. For today's world population there is 1.9 hectares of biologically productive land per person to supply resources and absorb wastes. The average person on this earth uses 2.3 hectares. The 'footprint' of the average American is 9.7 compared for example to 2 hectares for people in developing countries.

Regulations concerning genetically modified (GM) foods

Doctors for the Environment supports the policy of the Public Health Association of Australia. We believe that full labeling of GM foods is essential. Currently, GM food labeling does not cover foods that are: made from animals fed with GM feed (eg meat, milk, eggs, honey), highly refined foods (e.g. cooking oil, sugars, starches) prepared at bakeries, restaurants or takeaways, unintentionally contaminated by up to 1% per ingredient, processed and on supermarket shelves before 7 December 2001, containing processing aids or food additives using GM microbes, or contain GM flavours present at less than 0.1%.

We make this point because although the regulations in Australia are inadequate, they are non-existent in the USA where appropriate health safeguards have been negated at the behest of powerful industry voices. It must surely be a matter of concern that Australia has given US representatives the same rights as Australians to participate in the development of Australia's standards and regulations. The USA has a track record of legal action against countries that have labeling laws on the basis that they are a barrier to trade. It is not difficult to conclude that the USA will work to prevent improvement in Australia's existing regulations and indeed work towards their demolition. Articles 8.5 and 8.7 could be used by the USA to exert pressure and deliver outcomes inappropriate to the health needs of the Australian community.

Why is comprehensive labeling essential? Because it provides the basis for long-term studies on individuals and populations to document possible health effects of those substances ingested. In the same way longitudinal studies have been the basis for the linkage of heart disease to the intake of certain fats. The lack of accurate labeling is a denial of a tool that should be used to protect human health

In general this need for surveillance has been dismissed by government regulatory bodies with statements that there is no evidence that GM foods are harmful to human health. Such statements are misleading because the appropriate scientific studies have not been done.

Yours sincerely

David Shearman Hon Secretary, Doctors for the Environment Australia Inc”