

Secretary
Submission to the Senate Select Committee on the Free Trade Agreement
Parliament House Canberra

30 April 2004

Please accept my submission below:

I cannot understand why the Australian government would be so keen to sign Australia on to an agreement that is clearly not in the interest of the nation's people. I have objections to every chapter of the agreement and outline some of the reasons here.

The development of the AUS-FTA has been carried out behind closed doors in a non-democratic manner. The deal was rushed through putting much pressure on Australia which was already in a very weak negotiating position given the relative size of our economy. Economic analyses of the agreement indicate that, at best, we would not be any better off in direct economic terms. Even using economic-rationalist thinking that the government supports, this doesn't make sense! The agreement will have far reaching implications for us in ways that the public have not had time to learn about such as the impact of changing intellectual property laws.

Issues such as quarantine are vital to our nation but have been lost in the rush. The agriculture industry is tentatively supporting the agreement on the grounds of market access but they, perhaps more than anyone, have more to lose from the change in quarantine regulations that this FTA introduces. Australia already suffers from a lack of resources to control invasive species. The evidence that it is a serious national issue is shown through the existence of the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management.

The creation in Chapter Seven of the agreement (Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures) of the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and the Standard Technical Working Group on Animal and Plant Health Measures will have a negative impact on Australian quarantine. There are several ways in which it will do this: 1) The members of the Committee and Working Group will be in regular contact and have a meeting once a year, this reduces time that could be spent on other things 2) It is likely to compromise our quarantine standards over time through pressure from skilled US negotiators who have no interest in Australian agriculture or biodiversity 3) the Committee and Working Group have provision to create sub-groups and it is not explicitly stated that industry representatives or puppets cannot be members of the sub-groups 4) most importantly, the main objective underpinning both groups is to facilitate and enhance trade, not protect Australian agriculture and biodiversity.

Warren Truss and other government politicians continually reassure the public that no essential change has been made to our quarantine regulations. I ask then why Chapter Seven had to be included in the agreement. Both Australia and the USA are members of the WTO and abide by their Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement regulating quarantine with

respect to trade. The USA would only have pushed for the inclusion of this section if they thought that they could wield some power, which they will be able to do so. Certainly their industry groups think that this will be the case.

One only has to read the media statements by the US negotiators to understand who came out the losers in this deal. They gained "unprecedented market access for U.S. films and television programs over

a variety of media". Zoellick goes on to say that they achieved "the most significant immediate cut in industrial tariffs ever achieved in a U.S. free trade agreement, and manufacturers are the big winners". However the Australian farmers, on whose behalf the government so often argues that the FTA is good for Australia, have to wait many years to get any reduction in tariffs. This is not free trade and it is not good for Australia.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to the Australian people who have been dismissed by John Howard through the refusal to put the agreement before the politicians who represent us.

Sally Kingsland