

Senate Select Committee

>Inquiry into the USFTA

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> I wish to take up just two areas of the Australia/United
> States

> Free Trade Agreement for comment.

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>1. Medical

> US drug companies will have too much influence. The
> Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee will be subject under the
> USFTA to more influence from US drug companies before the products
are

> listed; decisions made by the Advisory Committee not to list some
> products are then to be reviewed by an "independent" group; prices of
> items in the the list finally decided on can be increased through
> allowing an extra opportunity for drug companies to apply for price
> changes. In this process, the commercial interests of the US drug
> companies are given greater priority than the Australian public
health

> goal of affordable medicine, an objective not even mentioned.

> The Australian public has yet to know the detail of these
changes

> which is still to be developed, a process in which the US will be
involved .

> A joint medicines working group is to be set up which can
> influence future policy. One of the principles for this group is to
> uphold intellectual property rights of drug companies, but again
there is

> no mention of Australian public health goals.

> These arrangements create a pressure towards more expensive
> medicines for Australians, to the detriment particularly of the most
> underprivileged members of our society.

> With regard to blood products, the USFTA appears to go
against

> the finding of the Parliamentary Committee of 2001. This Committee
> decided that a central supplying entity, the Commonwealth Serum
> Laboratories, should be responsible for supplying blood products for
> reasons of national security and public health. This arrangement
will be

> replaced by a tender process by 2009. Moreover, the suppliers must
meet

> a trade test regarding safety and quality requirements. Safety and
> quality will now not be allowed to "have the effect of creating
> unnecessary obstacles to trade" (dispute settlement provisions).

Thus

> the right of Australians to make the decisions that relate to blood
> products is impaired.

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>2. Quarantine

> The proposed arrangements give the US too much power over a
>vital

> Australian interest. The USFTA establishes two committees to deal
with

> quarantine policies and processes and technical matters. The US as
well

> as Australia is represented on each of these committees. One of the
> goals is "to facilitate trade" with disputes to be resolved "through

> mutual consent". Facilitating trade might come at the expense of
> scientific management of our quarantine requirements.
> According to Global Trade Watch " the US Government states
that
> food inspection procedures that have posed barriers in the past will
be
> addressed, benefiting sectors such as pork, citrus, apples and stone
> fruit." If this is the case, the changes are not minor ones. They
have
> the potential for drastically affecting our environment and our
farmers.
> Australian quarantine decisions, whether regarding GM foods,
> salmon, pork or anything else, need to be made entirely by Australian
> scientists on biological grounds without reference to trading goals.
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> Yours sincerely,
> Mrs Jan Tendys
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