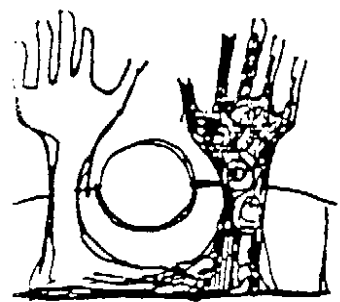




ABORIGINAL HERITAGE SUPPORT GROUP

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ATTN: The Committee on the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States of America.

I write on behalf of the Aboriginal Heritage Group of South Australia to express concern over the proposed USFTA. After studying a summary of the agreement, several areas have given rise to significant concern. These focus on the proposed US interference over decision -- making bodies in Australia on issues which directly impact on Australian society.

In particular I refer to three areas with reference to their impact on Aboriginal people.

- HEALTH: The possible changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme under the Free Trade Agreement which could see price rises on medications would have a severe impact on the Aboriginal community, which has a significant reliance on medical assistance to manage health problems. Combined with recent attacks on Medicare and a reduction in bulk-billing doctors, this could be catastrophic.
- ENVIRONMENT: Significant difficulties arise from the proposal to link Australia to a country which is responsible for producing the majority of the world's greenhouse gases. The US has already influenced Australia's decision to reject the Kyoto agreement, raising doubts as to Australia's ability to make decisions in it's own or the world's interests on environmental issues where these are in conflict with those of the US.

The ability of the US to dilute Australia's standards governing disclosures of the use of GM Foods will deny the Australian people choice in the production and consumption of these foods. As custodians of this land, Aboriginal people have great concern in protecting our environment.

- MEDIA: The maintenance of Australian control over the content and ownership of our media is vital to facilitate debate on essential issues. This is under threat under the proposed FTA and must be guarded against. It is essential to maintain a distinctly Australian voice telling our own stories, exploring issues pertinent to our own history and culture, particularly in relation to Indigenous people. Any US interference in this sphere to ensure economic benefit to itself would be a very destructive influence.

According to the report of the government's own consultants, Australia stands to make minimal if any economic gain from this agreement, while surrendering its rights as a sovereign nation to make decisions based on the effects on its own people.

As presented, this agreement benefits the US by imposing policies and practices on Australia which have already proved detrimental to the poor and vulnerable citizens of its own country. It does not do justice to Australia's interests and should be rejected.

Yours

for Susan M. Shepherd

