

ADELAIDE JUSTICE COALITION

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Aboriginal Heritage
Support Group
PO Box 10031
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Adelaide Voices Inc
PO Box 6042
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Brian Burdekin Clinic
27 Selby Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Romero Community
Development
PO Box 210
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Adelaide Day Centre for
Homeless Persons Inc
32 Moore Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Refugee Support Service
PO Box 604
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Submission to Senate Select Committee on the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States of America.

26 April, 2004

The Adelaide Justice Coalition includes organisations dedicated to providing a just and equitable society which cares for those in need and works towards ending poverty and injustice. We have serious concerns that the so-called "Free Trade Agreement" between Australia and the USA will not benefit ordinary Australians but rather create increased levels of poverty and a widening gap between rich and poor.

Our specific concerns regarding the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) are as follows:

(1) Economic and social benefits are unlikely to eventuate.

No analysis of the FTA has received widespread agreement that the people of Australia will benefit either economically or socially. There are also no analyses which indicate that the FTA will assist in reducing poverty or minimising the gap between rich and poor. With the absence of clear benefits, the Government will be acting against the interests of the Australian people if it signs the Agreement.

(2) The FTA dispute resolution process is unfair and undemocratic.

The people adversely affected by the Free Trade Agreement have no certain mechanism for challenging the legality of laws or policies enforced by the Agreement. This process is fundamentally undemocratic and should not be supported by the Australian Government.

(3) Government subsidies on essential medicines will be prohibited.

The FTA will require changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme which will increase the cost of medicines for all people, with greatest impact on the poor and marginalised. A Government that supports such changes is clearly acting against the wellbeing of its people.

(4) Educational institutions will be penalised.

Under the extended copyright laws proposed for the FTA costs of copying teaching and research materials at schools, universities and public libraries will increase thereby providing further hardships for those seeking education under a system which is becoming less available to those who do not come from wealthy backgrounds.

(5) Australia will have reduced ability to restrict the activities of foreign investors.

The FTA will make it easier for foreign companies to force unwanted products and services onto the Australian people. This will lead to a decrease in local manufacturing and the erosion of Australian content in film and television.

(6) Local control of essential services will be decreased.

Essential services such as health, education, energy and water supply should be under the control of Australian authorities. Because these services are supplied on a commercial basis they will be subject to the FTA which means that they may potentially be controlled by foreign companies or agencies. This is not acceptable.



(7) Quarantine and labelling safeguards will be undermined.

Current Australian quarantine and food labelling laws are made with the sole purpose of protecting the health and wellbeing of the Australian people and our environment. Under the FTA new consideration must be given to the impact on trade with the USA. It is likely that food safety and environmental protection will be compromised to encourage new trade deals.

(8) Australian content in media will decrease

The FTA has provisions which limit the amount of Australian content on television and through interactive audio and video services. There are also limitations on the amount of money that can be spent on producing Australian media content. It is completely unacceptable that any other country has the ability to dictate to us how much media content can be locally produced.

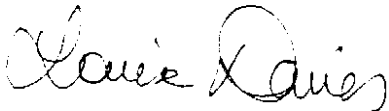
(9) Australian jobs will be lost

With the abolition of many tariffs and agreements to support local manufacturers there will be a significant fall in Australian employment. This is not in the interest of the Australian community.

We see no evidence that the FTA is of any benefit to the people of Australia. On the contrary, it will lead to an erosion of the ability of the Australian Government to make decisions in the interests of the Australian people, will weaken Australia's independence, will compromise Australian content in the media and most importantly will jeopardise employment opportunities, thereby increasing the gap between rich and poor.

We strongly oppose the FTA and encourage the Senate Committee to recommend that the Government withdraw from the agreement in its entirety.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Davies
(For the Adelaide Justice Coalition)