

Senate Select Committee

AUSTRALIA US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

As a consumer organisation we are concerned about:

- The possibility of higher costs for pharmaceuticals because of the likelihood of changes to the PBS. Any agreement that gives prioritises the commercial interests US pharmaceutical manufacturers above the social policy of providing affordable access to medicines to Australians, or increases the cost of the PBS to the Australian Government is unacceptable to consumers.
- Alterations to our food labelling laws, including labelling of GE foods. Australia has comprehensive labelling laws that allow consumers to make clear choices according to their dietary needs and ethical concerns. Any changes to our new labelling system that results in consumers having less information with which to make choices is unacceptable.
- Possible challenges to the Australian content in film, television and music that may result ultimately in loss of jobs and cultural identity. Change that gives rise to these outcomes is unacceptable to consumers.
- The possibility of changes to our quarantine and environmental regulations that result in compromise decisions about our environment, crops and livestock. Any agreement that allows the US to dictate and alter our existing laws is unacceptable to consumers.
- Changes to tariffs in our textile, clothing and footwear industries and on motor vehicles and parts. These industries provide significant employment to thousands of people with a non-English speaking background. While the USFTA may result in lower priced consumer goods, it should not be at the expense of loss of employment to large numbers of workers which would result in a depressed Australian economy.

While it may be argued that the USFTA will provide some benefits to Australians, particularly in the agricultural sector, it would seem that the benefits will not be as great as originally perceived, and they will only occur over a number of years. There will be no long term benefits if they occur at the expense of markets already existing in places like South East Asia

This Association does not support the Free Trade Agreement with the US because it cannot see significant long term benefits for Australian consumers. In the USFTA trade law is given priority over social justice policies. The Consumers' Association of WA urges Cabinet not to endorse this agreement.

Yours