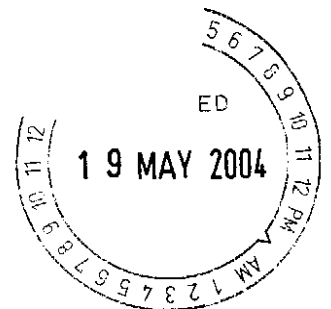


**Senate Select Committee on USFTA
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600**



**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
THE PROPOSED AUSTRALIA-US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (USFTA)**

I strongly object to the proposed USFTA and believe it will be detrimental to Australian society, culture, environment and economy, and impinge on our sovereignty.

I base my objections to the proposed USFTA on the grounds that it :

- weakens price controls on medicines by allowing US pharmaceutical companies to seek reviews of decisions by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. This will inevitably lead to increases in the cost of medicines.
- sets up a new joint policy committee, which gives the US government a voice in Australian medicines policy, based on US trades policy and not the Australian public health policy of affordable access to medicines for all.
- limits Australian content rules for new forms of media, and allows the US government to challenge the rules - even for public broadcasting regulation as a barrier to free trade. Australian media could, in the new era of digital TV, become almost entirely dominated by cheaper American content, eroding Australia's unique cultural identity and lessening the opportunity for our own local and national stories and dialogue to be heard in Australia.
- adopts US copyright law, leading to higher costs for libraries, schools and universities.
- "binds" or freezes many areas of state and local government regulation at existing levels and limits the ability of governments to make new laws and policies on essential services such as water, health or education.
- limits the powers of the Foreign Investment Review Board to veto investment if it is not in the national interest. Under the Agreement US investment in Australia must be treated in the same way as local investment and US

investors cannot be required to use local products, transfer technology or contribute to exports. Reduced FIRB powers could mean that 90% of US investment will not be reviewed at all.

- instigates joint committees based on US trade policy to give the US government a say in quarantine and regulation of GE and other food labelling.

Australia's quarantine regulation should be made on a scientific basis in the interests of Australia, not as part of a trade dialogue with a much more economically powerful country. The promotion of trade and the promotion of Australia's environment, crops and livestock are separate roles, which should not be combined.

The Agreement's proposed changes to processes and procedures for regulation of quarantine and GE regulation give the US a formal role in Australia's policy. It ensures that trade obligations to the US will be high on the list of priorities when regulations are being formulated.

- outlaws government purchasing policies that give preference to local products or require US contractors to form links with local firms to support local employment, and
- has a disputes process which enables the US government to challenge many Australian laws and regulations before a trade tribunal on the grounds that they are too burdensome for business or a barrier to trade.

I firmly believe that the Australia US Free Trade Agreement (USFTA) does not serve the interests of the Australian public and should be rejected outright.

Yours Faithfully



Mr. M.Houston

Source: Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network