

Dear committee members of the inquiry into the proposed China-Australia Free Trade Agreement,

I write this submission as a citizen that is concerned about certain provisions within the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); namely the provisions that allow Chinese companies that invest in excess of \$150 million to import workers from China rather than employee locals, the fact that such workers are not required to undergo skill aptitude tests to ensure that their skillset meets Australian industry standards and the proposed investor dispute mechanism.

With youth unemployment the highest in a decade and the loss of jobs within the manufacturing and mining sectors we, as a nation cannot sit idly back and allow potential job opportunities to be created in Australia for foreign workers. Furthermore these workers will be a captive workforce, isolated from the rest of society and vulnerable to exploitation. Allowing foreign companies to import workers will have the effect of lowering the working conditions of the local workers who are forced to compete with this captive and exploited workforce, and it will of course provide Chinese companies with an unfair advantage over local ones during tender and other competitive processes.

The fact that imported workers such as electricians will not be subject to the same industry standards as local workers creates unnecessary risks both within the workplace and towards the general public. What happens if such electricians are responsible for the electrical wiring of a commercial or residential building and carry out work that does not meet local standards? This will expose the general public to unnecessary risks and potential fatalities.

I am afraid I have to call this trade agreement for what it is: it is a job-destroying trade agreement that has been negotiated in secret; the government should be creating jobs for local workers, not destroying them. While these provisions are worrying enough, for me the most concerning of all is the proposed investor dispute mechanism. If the CAFTA passes in its current form it will represent a frontal attack on our democratic system, for it hands foreign companies the right to sue our governments if they happen to enact policies/regulations/laws that run contrary to their commercial interests.

This is just insane, it basically says 'sure we'll use taxpayer money to pay the litigation wins to foreign companies, if we happen to enact policies that benefit the people but run contrary to the commercial interests of a foreign company'. By adopting this attitude the government has betrayed the Australian people.

We have already seen how much of a drain the current investor dispute with tabaco companies in Hong Kong has drained from much needed and precious government resources: imagine if we agree to submit the Australian people to more of these inherently biased tribunals; imagine how much public resources would be wasted, not to mention the erosion of our sovereignty and democratic rights.

I believe that Labor and the minor parties have an obligation to stand up for the Australian people and reject the CAFTA in its current form; the people will respect you for doing so. A bad trade deal is worse than no trade deal. If the CAFTA is passed in its current form it will be a loss not gain for our nation.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission and ask to you all to PLEASE reject the CAFTA in its current form.

Yours sincerely,

Dennielle Cooke