



Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

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Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into Australia's accession to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement

To the Joint Standing Committee

Please accept this submission on the Treaties Inquiry into Australia's accession to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement.

While the SSEC supports positive, global trading connections, we are concerned that adequate and appropriate safeguards be included in agreements to ensure the environment and human rights are protected.

Process

SSEC is dismayed that the WTO GPA accession process was undertaken in secret. Information throughout the negotiation period was very limited and opportunity to comment along the way was non-existent. SSEC expresses its deep dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency over agreements that will impact on Australian environments and communities. SSEC observes that the legislation required for this agreement was passed by the Parliament on October 17, well before this treaty was tabled and this JSCOT inquiry was announced on November 30. This fact emasculates the ability of this inquiry to review the legislation.

Use of environmentally friendly products and processes

SSEC urges the Australian Government to retain and promote the importance of considering whole-of-life environmental impacts in the procurement of products and services. Whilst price is important, it must not become the key criterion in procurement processes.

Local employment

SSEC urges the retention of exemptions for small and medium-sized enterprises in international trade agreements. SMEs cannot in the main compete with well-resourced, multi-national companies in procurement bids. Local employment must be protected....The Australian Government must not sign away its capacity to protect and support Australian businesses.

Finally, SSEC supports the principles for trade negotiations and positions taken in the AFTINET submission on this Treaties Inquiry.

Tassia Kolesnikow, Chair