

SUBMISSION NO. 7
Treaties Ratification Bill 2012

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Committee Secretary
The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Ref: Review of the Treaties Ratification Bill 2012 – with particular reference to Trade

Dear Committee Secretary,

We are writing to express our support for the submission sent to the Committee by the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) and we thank the Committee for accepting AFTINET's submission after the closing date and we hope for accepting this letter of support for it.

Our union, the State Public Services Federation (SPSF) supports the development of trading relationships with all countries and recognises the need for regulation of trade through the negotiation of international rules. We support the principle of multilateral trade negotiations provided these are conducted within a framework which is transparent, provides protection to weaker countries and is founded upon respect for democracy, human rights and environmental protection.

We also believe that any changes to policies which affect the public interest should be publicly debated and decided by Parliaments at the national or State level, not secretly negotiated and signed.

We believe that the following principles should underpin Australia's trading relations and agreements:

- Trade agreements should not undermine human rights and environmental protection, based on United Nations and International Labour Organisation standards,
- Trade agreements should not undermine the ability of governments to regulate in the public interest,
- Trade agreements should allow developing countries the flexibility to make laws and policies which will allow them to direct their own development,
- Trade negotiations should be undertaken through an open, democratic and transparent process which allows effective public consultation to take place,

- Australia's trade negotiations with developing countries should be consistent with Australia's development goals,
- Before trade negotiations begin, comprehensive studies of the likely impacts should be undertaken and made public for debate and consultation. The issues studied should include the impacts on:
 - human rights and labour conditions
 - employment
 - environment
 - particular demographic groups, particular regions and particular industries
 - the ability of governments to regulate in the public interest
 - the ability of developing countries to direct their development.

With particular reference to the review currently being undertaken by the Committee, we endorse the conclusions made in AFTINET's submission:

- Trade negotiations should be undertaken through open, democratic and transparent processes that allow effective Parliamentary and public consultation to take place about whether negotiations should proceed and the content of negotiations.
- There should be regular public and parliamentary consultations throughout the negotiations, and where possible, negotiating texts should be released. There is a precedent for this in WTO negotiations, where position papers and draft texts are released on the WTO website
- Before an agreement is signed, comprehensive studies of the likely economic, social and environmental impacts of the agreement should be undertaken and made public for debate and consultation.
- Parliament should then debate and vote on the full text of trade agreements before the decision is made to sign them.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require clarification of any of these points.

Yours sincerely

David Carey
Federal Secretary
CPSU SPSF Group

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