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Don't trade away health, labour, cultural and environmental policies

The Australian Government is involved in negotiations for a Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) with the US, Chile, Peru, Brunei, Singapore, New Zealand and Vietnam to develop a multilateral agreement based on the bilateral agreements the US has with five of these countries. This will resurrect all of the issues that were debated in the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

The Howard Government negotiated the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement in 2003-4. The US government and companies identified the following Australian policies as barriers to trade that they wanted to remove or change as part of the free trade agreement:

- Price controls under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which ensure Australians affordable access to medicines
- Labelling of genetically engineered food
- Australian content rules in audio-visual media like film and television
- The Foreign Investment Review Board
- Quarantine regulations
- Local content requirements for government purchasing

The US government also wanted an investor-state disputes process, which would have given US companies the right to sue Australian governments for damages on the grounds that environmental or other public interest laws could harm their investments. US companies have used this process in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to sue Canadian and Mexican governments for millions of dollars.

There was strong community opposition to the US agenda, because we believed that health, environmental, social and cultural policies should be decided through democratic parliamentary processes, not secretly bargained away in trade agreements.

The community campaign did have an impact. There was no investor-state disputes process, no changes to GE food labelling, and limited changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and local media content.

The agreement also had very weak labour and environment clauses, which were not legally based on International Labour Organisation standards.

The TPPA means that all the issues we kept out of the US–Australia Free Trade Agreement will be up for negotiation again. We know from submissions made by US business groups that they want to use the negotiations to obtain more changes in most of the areas listed above, and to push for an investor-state complaints process.

The government has said that they will try to use the agreement to improve Australian access to US agricultural markets, but the danger is that further changes to the PBS and the other policies will be demanded as trade-offs.

We are asking the government to adopt the following principles in the TPPA negotiations:

- **No further changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme which would reduce affordable access to medicines**
- **No investor-state disputes process which would give special rights to international corporations to sue governments for damages**
- **Full rights to regulate labelling of genetically engineered food and to regulate GE crops, including existing moratoria**
- **No further weakening of Australian Government power to regulate audiovisual media for Australian content purposes**
- **Retention of the Foreign Investment Review Board, and of its powers to review foreign investment in the public interest**
- **No weakening of quarantine regulations**
- **No reductions in the ability to have local content requirements for government purchasing and industry policies that support local employment**
- **Strong labour clauses that require signatories to enforce the core International Labor Organisation's (ILO) standards in the ILO Conventions, with trade penalties for non-compliance**
- **Strong environmental clauses that require signatories to meet all applicable international environmental standards including those contained within UN environmental agreements, with trade penalties for non compliance.**

The following organisations support these principles:

Australian Council of Trade Unions	Friends of the Earth Australia
Australian Conservation Foundation	Finance Sector Union of Australia
Australian Catholic Social Justice Council	Global Trade Watch
Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation	The Grail Global Justice Network (Australia)
Public Health Association of Australia	Latin American Solidarity Network (LASNET)
Australian Education Union	Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
Australian Manufacturing Workers Union	Maritime Union of Australia Victorian Branch
Australian Nursing Federation	National Tertiary Education Union
Australian Services Union	Nature Conservation Council NSW
Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' League Queensland	Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee
Combined Pensioners' and Superannuants' Association of NSW	Western Australian and Canberra Regional Meetings of Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Community and Public Sector Union, State Public Services Federation	Republic Now Association
Community and Public Sector Union, (Commonwealth) Public Sector Union	SEARCH Foundation
Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union	The Alliance to Expose GATS
Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (Retired Members)	The Environment Centre, Northern Territory
Organic Federation of Australia	Union Aid Abroad- APHEDA
Economic Reform Australia	