

CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CLRI (NSW)

ABN 52 476 362 010
Member of Catholic Church Religious Group

The Honourable Bob Carr
Premier,
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Friday 2 July, 2004

Dear Mr Carr,

Re: Australia – US Free Trade Agreement

I write on behalf of the CLRI Justice committee, a group representing the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW. CLRI includes approximately 4,000 Catholic Religious and their associates.

We are concerned by recent media reports that indicated your preparedness to accept the terms of the US Free Trade Agreement (USFTA) on key areas of health, cultural and social policy.

As you are aware, the enabling legislation for the USFTA will be voted on by the Senate after the Senate Select Committee on the USFTA has tabled its final report on 12 August. The interim report of the Committee, which was issued on 24 June, discusses the evidence on the USFTA and expresses serious concerns on a number of issues, including:

- changes to the PBS and patent law that could result in higher prices for pharmaceuticals,
- limits on Australian content rules for new forms of media,
- the adoption of US copyright laws (that on the analysis of Dr Philippa Dee will cost Australians \$88 million per year), and
- the establishment of several joint US-Australian committees that give the US input into Australia's future policies on medicines and quarantine.

The independent econometric analysis by Dr Philippa Dee of the ANU, commissioned by the Senate Committee, estimates that the economic benefits to Australia from this agreement will be small, largely because of very limited access to US agricultural markets.

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Many of these issues were raised in submissions by ALP state and territory governments to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. These state government submissions expressed disappointment also at the exclusion of the US sugar market and the slow rate of market access for beef, dairy and wine.

These are also precisely the issues that were listed for consideration by the ALP Leader Mark Latham when he pledged in January that the ALP was prepared to block the implementing legislation for the USFTA if the agreement were not in the national interest.

The high number of submissions to both parliamentary inquiries (over 700) indicates the strong community concern about the USFTA. In your consideration of the impact of the Agreement, we urge you to take special note of the Interim and Final Reports of the Senate Committee so that your final stance may reflect accurately the national interest of all Australians.

We look forward to your response to this critical issue for our nation.

Yours sincerely

Jan Barnett rsj
(for CLRI NSW)

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