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1. AFTINET launches new USFTA publication

Over 200 people attended AFTINET's public meeting on 1 April in Sydney to launch the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) publication "Ten devils in the detail of the US Free Trade Agreement".

Dr Peter Sainsbury, President of the Public Health Association, Geoff Morrell, star of Grassroots and Changi, AFTINET Convenor Dr Patricia Ranald, UnitingCare Director Rev. Harry Herbert and Julius Roe, President of the Manufacturing Workers' Union, revealed the impact of the USFTA on the price of medicines, Australian content in new media and services like aged care and manufacturing employment.

We also held a media launch on Tuesday 30 March. Media covering the event included SBS TV news, ABC radio news, Sydney Morning Herald, AAP and Media Monitors, 2SER and 3CR.

All AFTINET members will be receiving a copy in the next few days, if not already. The leaflet is designed to help with submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into the USFTA, due by 13 April and the Senate Inquiry, due by 30 April. See below for information on events in Sydney on 19 April and 4 May when the Committees will be taking evidence.

2. Sydney events for Committee hearings: 19 April and 4 May

Event on 19 April during Joint Standing Committee on Treaties hearings

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle's office is organising a protest about the USFTA, which will be held when the Joint Committee on Treaties begins its hearings on the agreement in Sydney.

When: April 19, 2004 from 12 noon to 1pm

Where: Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney

For more information phone 02 9690 2038 or see the webpage: www.kerrynettle.org.au

Event on 4 May during Senate Select Committee on the USFTA

AFTINET will hold a rally on 4 May during the lunchtime break of the Senate Committee inquiry on the USFTA. Details of speakers will be provided in further bulletins.

When: 4 May, 12.30 pm

Where: Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street, Sydney

3. Ask SBS to produce USFTA debate

The Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association have requested the SBS *Insight* program to produce a debate on the USFTA. Please support their efforts to encourage debate by making a comment on the SBS website. The CPSA's letter is copied below, with instructions about the site.

'Please visit 'Insight' SBS's Tuesday night discussion forum. Click on suggest a topic/ guest (right hand side of page). Fill in your details and write in your own words that you too would like to see a discussion forum on the US/Australia Free Trade Agreement and why. You can make it personal, controversial, emotional, and as brief as you like. If you want to maintain low cost medicine, support the Australian farming industry, support Australian content in film, tv and new media or are opposed to the privatisation of Telstra, please take the time to do this. Then forward it on to as many people as you possibly can. The producers at Insight have informed me that with sufficient public interest around a topic they will air the program.'

<http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/>

4. Online bets on cards with WTO

Australian Financial Review, 30 March, p 3.

By Katrina Nicholas

A landmark ruling by the World Trade Organisation could open the way for Australians to gamble legally at overseas-based internet casinos, overriding the federal government's prohibition on online gaming.

The WTO ruled last week that US laws barring online casinos based in Antigua and Barbuda violated the country's obligations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services.

Lawyers said the case would have serious ramifications for Australia, which has the same commitment to GATS as the US to allow free international trade in services. "What this means is that offshore online casinos may be able to provide their services to Australians," said a partner at international commercial lawyers Coudert Brothers, Jamie Nettleton.

The WTO ruling, which could open the way for the UK giants like Ladbrokes and William Hill to operate locally, has raised concerns about an uneven playing field for local online casinos, which under Australia's present laws are not allowed to take bets from Australians.

But the managing director of Australian online casino Lasseters, Peter Bridge, said the WTO ruling was a good outcome. "It sets a good precedent because it shows a minnow like Antigua can challenge the [online gambling] laws of the US," he said.

Australia demonstrated its commitment to keeping restrictions on internet gambling during its free-trade agreement talks with the US. A recent letter from Trade Minister Mark Vaile to his US counterpart, Robert Zoellick, outlined the two countries' agreements on various matters, including "the objectives of protecting public morals ... that underlies much regulation of gambling and betting services".

The letter says Australia shares the US's understanding on this, and that this "constitutes an integral part of the [free-trade] agreement". Mr Vaile's office confirmed yesterday that Australia was subject to the same services trade agreement as the US, but said the legal implications of the WTO ruling were not yet known.

Washington officials have vowed to appeal the WTO decision.

5. Australia-China FTA Joint Feasibility Study: Call for Public Submissions

DFAT media release 31 March 2004

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Study Taskforce invites public submissions and comment on issues relevant to the joint FTA feasibility study between Australia and China.

Prime Minister John Howard and China's President Hu Jintao witnessed the signing of the Trade and Economic Framework between Australia and the People's Republic of China (TEF) on 24 October 2003 by Australian Trade Minister, Mark Vaile and Chinese Vice Minister for Commerce, Yu Guangzhou. The TEF includes an agreement to undertake a joint feasibility study into the opportunities and challenges of a possible FTA between Australia and China.

The study is to be completed by October 2005 and will provide a basis for the Australian and Chinese governments to decide whether to negotiate an FTA.

The China FTA Study Taskforce will lead and coordinate Australia's contribution to the joint FTA feasibility study. It will accord high priority to the views and expertise of different groups on issues to be covered by the study. The Taskforce will consult widely, including with business, interested organisations, the general public and State and Territory Governments in the preparation of the study.

The terms of reference for the joint FTA feasibility study and related information can be found on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website: <http://www.dfat.gov.au>

The deadline for receiving submissions is Friday 18 June 2004. Submissions may be lodged electronically to chinafta@dfat.gov.au or by post at the following address:

China FTA Study Taskforce
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
BARTON ACT 0221
Telephone enquiries: (02) 6261 3113
Fax: (02) 6112 2468

6. Friends of the ABC: USFTA Dinner: Perth 23 April

A Friends of the ABC Dinner will be held at "Bentley Pines Restaurant", (in the TAFE College, opposite Curtin University), Hayman Road, Bentley at 6.30 P.M., Friday 23rd April 2004.

The Special Dinner Address will be given by Ms Dee Margetts, MLC on "The US Free Trade Agreement"

A brief meeting will be held during the dinner to complete arrangements originally scheduled for the A.G.M. on 9.11.03.

Cost: \$30 Per Head (Full Members Of FABC, And Non-FABC Guests) or \$25 Per Head (Concession Members Of FABC)

Please confirm and pay for your dinner bookings [Cheques To "FABC (WA)"] and advise of any special dietary needs by post to FABC, P.O. Box 179, Darlington, W.A. 6070 or reserve places by phone with Andrew Thomson (Ph: 08 9450 3424).

Further information about FABC(WA) is available at the website www.abcfriendswa.net or by postal enquiry to P.O. Box 179, Darlington, W.A. 6070