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Trade Review a mixed bag but has some welcome policy changes says fair trade group.

"The Government trade policy review places too much faith in unilateral tariff reductions and the theoretical benefits of free trade, while ignoring their impacts on industry development and employment" said Dr Patricia Ranald, convener of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network

“However, there are four important policy changes which we have advocated and which we welcome”, said Dr Ranald.

“Firstly, the government will not support trade agreement provisions which will restrict the ability of Australian governments to legislate on social, health and environmental issues. In particular, the government will no longer support the inclusion of investor state dispute procedures which give foreign investors greater legal rights than domestic investors, including rights to sue governments on issues like cigarette plain packaging legislation. This should mean that the government will oppose these demands by the US government in the current Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement negotiations” said Dr Ranald.

“Secondly, the government will not support increases in corporate intellectual property rights which would make medicines more expensive, and undermine the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. This should mean that the government will not agree to US government demands for increased corporate intellectual property rights and changes to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in the current Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement negotiations” she added

“Thirdly, there is an important policy improvement in transparency in trade negotiations. In the past, trade agreements were ratified in secret by Cabinet and only later examined by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. This policy has changed to enable consideration of trade agreements by the Joint Committee before ratification by Cabinet, which should lead to more public debate and better decisions” she explained.

“Fourthly, the government has given qualified support to the inclusion of labour and environmental provisions in trade agreements, but unfortunately the enforcement process is not clear. We support stronger labour and environmental provisions based on internationally agreed standards which would be enforced through the same mechanisms as other aspects of trade agreements, including trade sanctions,” she added.

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