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Just 40 Minutes for Australia's most ambitious Trade Agreement

“A forty minute discussion around Australia’s most ambitious trade agreement so far, is hardly the sort of parliamentary oversight that one would expect. Particularly when the impacts on climate change and seasonal migrant workers haven’t even been considered,” said Trade Justice advocate Adam Wolfenden today.

Today’s sitting of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties will consider Australia’s recently concluded Free Trade Agreement with Chile. The number of treaties for consideration today leaves an average of forty minutes for each.

The government has promoted the Australia Chile Free Trade Agreement (ACIFTA) as Australia’s most ambitious agreement. It will remove almost all tariffs on trade in goods between the two countries and see increased investment in services areas such as engineering, tourism, and IT.

The ACIFTA includes provision for extending the visa 457 temporary worker system to Chilean nationals.

“The inclusion of visa 457 in the Chile trade agreement comes before the government has even completed its own review of the controversial scheme. Before the government has seen what’s wrong with the scheme we’ve included it in a binding treaty,” stated Mr Wolfenden.

“Trade Minister Crean has identified mining companies as some of the big winners. This is probably due to the zero consideration of environmental impacts or climate change in the negotiations of this agreement,” continued Mr Wolfenden.

“This agreement also contains the controversial Investor-State Disputes Process, the mechanism that allows companies to sue governments. This same process was dropped from the US/Australia trade agreement due to public outcry, added Mr Wolfenden.

“The government went to the election promising to ensure that trade agreements would be assessed for their environmental, social, labour and regional impacts, and that Parliament would have a continuous role. We’re yet to see any of this for the Chile FTA,” concluded Mr Wolfenden.

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