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MEDIA RELEASE

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Fair trade campaigner slams Australia-Japan FTA.

Michele Freeman, Trade Campaigner with the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) said today:

Today's announcement that Japan and Australia have agreed to start negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) highlights the Australian Government's aggressive pursuit of an expanding FTA agenda.

The decision to begin negotiations has been announced without allowing any time for public consideration and debate of the Feasibility Study results, which were only released once the decision to go ahead with negotiations had been made.

The Feasibility Study has ignored potential social impacts from a FTA and made economic predictions (a gain of 39 billion dollars after 20 years) based on the unrealistic assumption of full and immediate free trade across all sectors. The Study admits that this economic modelling is a "simplification of reality and relies on numerous assumptions".

In the last week the Government has made announcements regarding FTAs with Chile, South Korea, and now Japan, bringing the tally of current FTA negotiations up to six. (Australia is already in negotiations with China, ASEAN-New Zealand, and Malaysia, and has expressed strong interest in an FTA with the GCC).

This relentless pursuit of bilateral trade agreements will only result in unequal agreements that will not deliver benefits to the majority of people.

AFTINET believes Australia should not retreat into bilateral agreements, but instead rethink multilateral trade rules and develop proposals for a more inclusive, democratic global trade system that delivers real economic development, and allows governments to retain their right to regulate in the public interest.

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