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MEDIA RELEASE

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Thousands back Senate Committee concerns on USFTA impacts on medicines, culture, social and environmental policies

Media Conference Parliament House, Canberra, Thursday 15 January, 11 am Room 1S4

As negotiations for a US Free Trade Agreement begin a final round, statements signed by 63 organisations and 2,223 individuals will be presented to the Trade Minister Vaile's Office today. The statements back key demands of the report by a Senate Inquiry into the USFTA which reported on November 27 2003.

Members of the Senate Committee and the Fair Trade Network today called on the Government to implement its recommendations to

- exclude health and cultural policies and essential services from trade agreements, including the price of medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Australian content rules in film and television
- reject proposals to allow corporations to challenge laws and sue governments
- ensure that Parliament debates and votes on the agreement, not just Cabinet

NSW Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said, "As negotiators rush towards another deadline, opposition to a free trade agreement with the United States is mounting. Opposition on so many fronts means a FTA with the US will have trouble getting through the US congress and the Australian Senate. Fair trade proposals that respected human rights, labour standards, environmental laws and national sovereignty would enjoy much broader support."

NSW Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway said, "The Democrats strongly endorse the recommendations of the Committee Report. In particular, we firmly believe that the best way to protect Australia's interests is to ensure that Parliament has an opportunity to debate and vote on proposed trade agreements, before our national sovereignty is signed away for years to come."

Dr Patricia Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), said "The Committee's recommendations and these thousands of statements show mounting community outrage that health and social policies can be determined by trade agreements. We should not trade away our right to policies in the public interest."

For interviews contact:

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