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MEDIA RELEASE

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ALP USFTA decision disappointing: amendments limited say community groups

"We are extremely disappointed that the ALP has chosen to implement the USFTA despite admitting that it is a bad deal," Dr Patricia Ranald of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre said today. Dr Ranald convenes the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), a national network of 87 community organisations that monitors the impact of trade agreements on domestic law and policy.

"The Senate Committee Report admits that USFTA could result in higher medicine prices, less Australian content in the media, higher copyright cost for schools, libraries and small software companies, reductions in quarantine protections and manufacturing job losses," explained Dr Ranald.

"The proposed ALP amendments to the USFTA implementing legislation only address some aspects of two of these issues, the delay in production of cheaper generic drugs and current Australian content rules. We will need to see the detail of the amendments to judge if they do provide any real protections in these areas," said Dr Ranald."

"We believe that some of the other 'safeguards' proposed through future legislation to soften the negative impacts of the agreement will not be legally effective if they are contrary to the agreement," added Dr Ranald.

"The whole point of trade agreements is that they are legally binding and are designed to prevent governments from passing future legislation contrary to the agreement," said Dr Ranald. "This means that future laws could be challenged through the disputes process of the USFTA by the US government if they were contrary to the agreement. The trade disputes panel could order them to be changed and could allow the US to impose trade penalties if they are not changed."

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