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MEDIA RELEASE

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ALP Senators report contradictory say community groups

"The report of the ALP members of the Senate Committee on the USFTA is contradictory, admitting it is a bad deal but still endorsing it," 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 ALP Senators show that the USFTA was negotiated badly and in haste and delivers far more to the US than to Australia. They admit that the USFTA could result in higher medicine prices, less Australian content in the media, higher copyright cost for schools, libraries and software companies, reductions in quarantine protections and manufacturing job losses," explained Dr Ranald.

"The Senators propose "safeguards" in the form of additional legislation or administrative processes to attempt to soften the negative impacts of the agreement," added Dr Ranald. "These would be welcome, but unfortunately many of them may not be legally effective. 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."

"Once the USFTA implementing legislation is passed, any law or policy that is contrary to the terms of the agreement can be challenged by the US government under the disputes process of the agreement," said Dr Ranald. "This means that future laws to protect the PBS or Australian media content can be challenged by the US government as a barrier to trade. The trade disputes panel can order them to be changed and can allow the US to impose trade penalties if they are not changed."

"We welcome the recommendations for more open and democratic procedures for negotiation of future trade agreements," said Dr Ranald.

"We repeat our call to ALP caucus members not to endorse the USFTA implementing legislation," said Dr Ranald.

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