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Media Release

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US Free Trade agreement threatens democratic rights and culture, says Colin Friels

Actor Colin Friels said today that the negotiations now under way behind closed doors for the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement threaten the democratic right of Australian governments to make laws about important social and cultural policies like Australian content in film and television.

"The US is saying that our local content rules are a barrier to trade," said Mr Friels. "This attacks our democratic right to ensure that Australian stories are told and that the media reflects the diversity of our culture. We call upon the government to exclude media and cultural policy from any trade agreements."

Mr Friels is speaking at a rally at 1pm today at Parliament House Macquarie St, Sydney, held outside the Senate Inquiry into the US Free Trade Agreement. ALP Senator Gavin Marshall and Greens Senator Kerry Nettle from the inquiry will also address the rally.

Another speaker, Dr Patricia Ranald of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre said: "The FTA would enable corporations to challenge laws and sue governments for damages. Under similar provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) the giant courier company United Parcel Service has challenged Canada Post's public provision of postal services as a barrier to trade. Australia Post supplies a similar service and could be under threat. This undermines democracy and national sovereignty and should not be part of any trade agreement."

Doug Cameron, National Secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, another speaker at the rally said "Manufacturing jobs will be put at risk if Australia enters into a Free Trade Agreement with the US. The US economy has a massive internal market with huge economies of scale. A flood of US imports could threaten many of our industries."

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