

Media release

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Consumers likely to lose out if Australia signs secretive trade deal

Australians hold serious concerns about a secretive trade deal which risks a blow-out in the cost of medicines, less Australian television content and relaxed labelling of genetically modified foods, according to a new report being released by The Australia Institute today.

The report titled "*A democracy deficit?*" shows that only 11 per cent of people surveyed said they 'definitely knew' about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Once people were informed of the deal, they overwhelmingly opposed the secrecy; 87 per cent believe that free trade agreements should be made public before they are agreed to by the government.

The Australia Institute's Executive Director, Dr Richard Denniss, will address a community forum in Melbourne tonight with speakers highlighting the impact the TPP could have on issues such as coal seam gas regulation, health policy, intellectual property and GMO labelling.

"The TPP trade deal could have significant, wide-ranging implications for Australian consumers, yet we are being kept in the dark by the government," Dr Denniss said.

"While parts of the agreement have been given to vested interests and companies in the US, public interest groups and ordinary Australians have not been given the same consideration."

The Federal Government has also indicated it may approve a clause which would allow foreign companies to sue Australia if they felt their profits were being harmed by a government decision, for example keeping the price of medicines down under our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme or regulating coal seam gas exploration. It is only when draft texts are leaked that real debate occurs in the community and government has to respond.

"Nearly 85 per cent of those surveyed expressed concern about this clause, known as ISDS, given it would allow laws passed in this country to be held ransom by foreign interests,"

Other survey findings:

- 67 per cent do not trust the federal government's promise that free trade agreements won't increase the cost of medicine.
- 76 per cent would not support Australia being prevented from requiring genetically modified foods to be clearly labelled.
- 85 per cent think Australia should set its own standards for the quality of goods sold here.
- 73 per cent of people thought that Australia would benefit from stronger regulation on what can be imported into this country.

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- 64 per cent would not support a trade agreement that allowed Australian television stations to show fewer Australian made programs.

“These are not hypothetical scenarios. The TPP could seriously impact on Australia’s ability to make decisions based on the best interests of its citizens. It is time that the Parliament and public is given full access to the draft text of the TPP and an opportunity to debate its content before it is considered and signed by Cabinet.”

Note for editors:

- *The Australia Institute conducted an online survey in November 2013. Respondents were sourced from a reputable independent online panel provider and received a small incentive of reward points to participate. Survey results are available at www.tai.org.au.*
- The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is currently under negotiation and establishes a free trade area including Australia, the United States of America, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand, Singapore, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru and Vietnam.
- More information about the Melbourne community forum can be found at www.tppaustralia.org