



AFTINET
Australian Fair Trade
& Investment Network Ltd

128 Chalmers Street
Surry Hills, NSW, 2010
Phone: 02 9699 3686
Fax: 02 9699 3717
Email: campaign@aftinet.org.au
ACN 097 603 131
ABN 83 659 681 462
www.aftinet.org.au

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Japan FTA secret text means announcement lacks detail about downsides

“The grand announcement about the Japan-Australia economic partnership agreement was made yesterday, but the text of the agreement remains secret. This enables a splash to be made about claimed benefits without public scrutiny of the downsides of the deal,” Dr Patricia Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, said today.

“The only available official information is a short [website summary](#) from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which is mostly selected information about increased market access for selected Australian agricultural products. There is no detail, for example, about the impact of what appears to be the immediate reduction of Australian tariffs on Japanese car imports. This could have an even more severe impact on employment in that industry which is already facing closure in three years’ time”, said Dr Ranald.

“We are relieved that the agreement appears not to include the right of foreign investors to sue governments over domestic legislation, known as investor-state dispute settlement or ISDS. We have campaigned strongly against this and thousands of social media messages expressing strong opposition were sent to the Trade Minister,” said Dr Ranald. “The Minister claims ISDS is not needed because both Australia and Japan have robust national legal systems. This makes the decision to include ISDS in the Korea FTA very puzzling. Is the Minister claiming that South Korea does not have a robust legal system?”

“In the last two weeks the London *Financial Times* reported that the [German Government](#) rejected ISDS in the US-EU Trans-Atlantic free trade negotiations, and the [Indonesian Government](#) is withdrawing from all investment agreements containing ISDS. Ten Latin American countries, South Africa and India have also rejected ISDS. Australia should follow these leads and refuse to include ISDS in any trade agreements,” said Dr Ranald.

“Tens of thousands of Australians have signed social media petitions against ISDS. The Greens have tabled a bill which would ban ISDS from all trade agreements and the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Committee is conducting a public inquiry into ISDS, with submissions closing on April 11. This inquiry will demonstrate that there is a wide range of community opposition, which sees ISDS as a threat to democracy and sovereignty”, said Dr Ranald.

Contact Dr Patricia Ranald 0419 695 841