



Free trade agreements

The ANMF recognises the economic benefits of international trade and its importance to strengthening the Australian economy. International trade however does not take place on a level playing field. It does not properly account for the inequities between trading partners in the developed and developing worlds. Negotiations are often dominated by the most powerful economies, often to the disadvantage of smaller and developing countries.

The ANMF evaluates any proposed free trade agreement on the following factors:

- the impact of the agreement on the provision and quality of health services;
- the impact of the agreement on nursing and midwifery practice and workforce;
- the relationship between the agreement and labour conditions and human rights;
- the maintenance of national sovereignty;
- the impact on the Australian labour market; and
- the impact on climate change and the environment.

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. Trade agreements should not disempower governments; undermine public and social services; or disadvantage local economies.
2. Free trade agreements must not undermine the sovereignty of a democratically elected government, hindering it in its duty to formulate policy and pass laws, which are in the best interests of the people it governs.
3. Prior to the signing of any free trade agreement the proposed agreement should be open to public scrutiny and independently assessed. The agreement should only be considered for endorsement if it provides a net economic benefit to Australia and does not undermine the principles set out in this policy in relation to national sovereignty and protection of core professional and industrial standards.
4. Any trade or investment agreement must not leave public health services currently regulated by the government open to foreign investment and control. The provision of health services is a public good and the responsibility of government. Governments provide public health services for social policy reasons that correct the failure of free markets to meet the broader community goal of universal and equitable access to health services. Consequently, the maintenance of a public health system as a publicly funded, fully accessible service is essential for the social benefit of all Australians.
5. Nursing and midwifery are regulated professions. In order to maintain standards and provide protection for the public, all nurses and midwives educated outside Australia and seeking to work in Australia must be required to meet the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia Professional Practice Framework requirements¹.

¹ Registered and enrolled nurses and midwives have their practice governed by a Professional Practice Framework set down by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) which assures protection of the public. The professional practice framework includes: registration; education standards; standards for practice; scope of practice; a decision-making framework; code of ethics; code of professional conduct; professional boundaries; and other relevant registration standards relating to: continuing professional development, criminal history checks, English language skills, recency of practice, and professional indemnity insurance arrangements.



ANMF Policy

6. Free trade agreements must meet national and internationally accepted labour laws as outlined in the International Labour Organisation conventions. Within any free trade agreement Australia must not engage in labour related activities that do not meet such conventions. Consideration must be given to any negative impact on employment and labour conditions. To this end, the ANMF supports legislation requiring labour market testing to ensure employers consider engaging local candidates first before looking offshore, and accessible and affordable education and skills based training.
7. Free trade agreements must acknowledge human rights, including the core right of freedom of association and ensure compliance is currently or will be attained before an agreement is reached.
8. Free trade agreements must examine any potential impact on the environment both in the present and for the future.
9. Effective community consultation processes must be established for any negotiations for a free trade agreement. The processes must be transparent, accountable and representative and should include all potentially affected parties. Clear processes must be established for effective and inclusive consultation and reasonable timeframes are set allowing sufficient time for effective input by the public.
10. Processes must be established during the negotiation of free trade agreements that gives all Australians the confidence there has been proper and thorough public scrutiny, including a multi-disciplinary analysis of the social and economic impact and that the agreement is in the public interest prior to any ratification processes.
11. Prior to the renewal of any free trade agreement a full evaluation of the impact of the agreement on Australian society and the Australian economy must be undertaken.

*adopted by federal executive November 2008
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