



Free trade agreements position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the principles that the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers Australian governments should adhere to when negotiating and ratifying free trade agreements. It should be read with the ANMF position statement: *International recruitment of nurses and midwives*.

2. Definitions

A **free trade agreement** (FTA) is an international treaty between two or more economies that reduces or eliminates agreed barriers to trade for certain goods, services and investment opportunities.

3. Context

The ANMF recognises the economic benefits of international trade and its importance to the growth and strength of the Australian economy. However, the ANMF notes that international trade takes place on an uneven playing field, with negotiations often dominated by powerful economies to the disadvantage of others. The ANMF therefore endeavors to evaluate any free trade agreement proposed by an Australian government against the following criteria:

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

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Australian governments must establish processes for the negotiation of all free trade agreements that give Australians confidence that proper and thorough community consultation and analysis, including multi-disciplinary analysis, of the social and economic impacts of the agreement is taking place.
2. All consultation processes must be transparent, accountable and representative and include all potentially affected parties, giving them reasonable time to review and respond to any proposals.
3. Before any free trade agreement is signed, the proposed agreement should also be open to public scrutiny and independently assessed.
4. Before a free trade agreement is renewed, a full evaluation of the impact of the agreement on Australian society and the Australian economy must be undertaken.
5. Only free trade agreements that provide a net economic benefit to Australia and do not undermine the following principles in relation to national sovereignty and the protection of core professional and industrial standards should be signed or renewed.



Principles

6. Free trade agreements must not undermine the sovereignty of a democratically elected government or hinder it in its duty to make policy and pass laws in the best interests of its people.
7. Free trade agreements must acknowledge human rights, including the core right of freedom of association, and ensure compliance is achieved, or will be achieved, before an agreement is signed.
8. Free trade agreements must not undermine public and social services or disadvantage local economies.
9. Free trade agreements must not leave public health services, currently regulated by Australian governments, open to foreign investment and control. It is the responsibility of government to provide universal and equitable access to health services or to correct the failure of free markets to do so.
10. Free trade agreements must meet national and internationally accepted labour laws as outlined in the International Labour Organisation conventions and must not undermine Australian employment and labour conditions.¹ This includes access to employment opportunities and education and training.
11. Free trade agreements must not undermine the regulatory framework under which nursing and midwifery operates. 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 and all other registration standards and requirements.²
12. Free trade agreements must examine any potential impact on the environment both short term and long term.

5. Position statement management

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¹ In keeping with this principle, the ANMF also supports legislation to ensure employers consider training and engaging local candidates before looking offshore.

² The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia professional practice framework is available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx>.