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27 Sept 2004

MEDIA RELEASE Our Ref: IHP.200 / IFT.004 / MAA.001

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme still in Doubt through FTA.

Just as we suspected and despite the 'amendments' to the Australia US so-called Free Trade Agreement, Australia's highly prized Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is still in very murky territory due to ambiguities which apparently still exist.

Experts are saying in a media release dated today 27/9/04 that "significantly different interpretations" exist between Australia and the U.S. regarding the PBS and the FTA.

"We had a feeling of unease despite arrangements arrived at resulting from the 'amendments' wrought to the AUSFTA through the Senate" said Morrie Mifsud, State President of Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW (CPSA).

"According to our reading of the relevant portion of the FTA document, we perceived far too many other loopholes through which the U.S. pharmaceutical industry could attack the Australian PBS" Mr Mifsud said.

"We were and still are very concerned despite our roles as laypersons. However, now experts are crystalising those concerns by what they say in today's media release" He said.

Mr Mifsud said that CPSA therefore joins those experts in calling for an "Interpretive declaration clarifying these ambiguities" to truly protect our PBS.

"In view of the fact that these clarifications must be concluded before ratification in late October 2004 of the Free Trade Agreement, we call upon Messrs. Howard and Latham to urgently address these matters" Mr Mifsud said.

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