

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

MTN/NTM/W/234

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Group "Non-Tariff Measures"

Sub-Group "Technical Barriers to Trade"

AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT AT SUB-GROUP MEETING ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE - 26 MARCH 1979

We understand that the revision of the Standards Agreement (MTN/NTM/W/192/Rev.4) before the Sub-Group today represents a near-final, if not final, text of a Standards Agreement.

This may therefore be an appropriate occasion for my delegation to remind the Sub-Group of difficulties Australia has expressed in the past about certain elements of the Standards Agreement, difficulties that have not been removed in the latest text. Firstly, on levels of obligation, we have said before, and say it again, that an agreement which contained provisions on levels of obligation which might be considered as going beyond the scope of Article XXIV:12 of the GATT would create difficulties for us. Secondly, as to the coverage of agriculture, in past meetings my delegation has not associated or disassociated itself with the agreement in so far as its application to agriculture is concerned. In doing so we have pointed to the concerns we have about the coverage of quarantine in the Agreement and have indicated that an important factor that would influence our consideration of the coverage of agriculture would be the degree of acceptance of the Australian proposal for a general safeguards clause. This proposal unfortunately has not found the acceptance of other delegations.

It would be premature at this meeting to attempt to predict the views of my Government about formally subscribing to the Standards Agreement that is before us today. Obviously, however, my Government's decision will be influenced by the factors I have referred to earlier in this statement and by the overall balance (or imbalance) of concessions that emerges from the MTN as a whole. I can assure members of the Sub-Group that my Government is giving this matter serious consideration.