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Written Submission to House of Commons International Trade Committee

**Question: “Under the chapter on Trade and Gender Equality, the Parties undertake to “agree to establish a Dialogue on Trade and Gender Equality”. What does this mean – and how significant is it?”**

Submission: Art 24.3 UK-Australia FTA creates the Dialogue on Trade and Gender Equality. It is composed of government representatives of both parties, and it may consider any matter that either party deems to arise under the Gender Chapter of the FTA. Parties may also engage relevant stakeholders in their exchanges.

Beyond these points, Art 24.3 provides limited guidance on the nature or purpose of the Dialogue or on the mechanisms through which it will be maintained. It is noteworthy that other chapters in the agreement set up Committees, such as the Committee on Cooperation, through which intergovernmental dialogue on all matters pertaining to the agreement is assured. The choice of word “dialogue” implies that this is a more informal type of intergovernmental cooperation, although this is not clear from the text of the agreement. The view that a less formalised mode of intergovernmental cooperation is being created here than in other parts of the agreement is supported by the fact that gender chapters in other FTAs (notably Canada and Chile’s gender chapters) set up Committees and define regular time periods when the Gender and Trade Committees must convene. This is not provided for in Art 24.3 UK-Australia. It is left up to the discretion of parties how often they choose to enter into dialogue on matters pertaining to Art 24.

Taken together, this indicates that the Dialogue will be as significant as both parties want to it to be – or as significant as the less enthusiastic party wants it to be.