

Cultural Treaties

Other than an exception for New Zealand, which arose by accident through the 1979 Closer Economic Relationship, Australia does not have a Country of Origin rule in the senses that such a rule provides a preference for the cultural media of particular countries.

UNESCO treaties and provisions appear only to have made a very limited impact, and that in parts of the academic and cultural communities.

Although Australia is a signatory to various international cultural treaties, given that New Zealand is the only adjacent country with a similar culture, we not surprisingly have no equivalent of the TV Without Frontiers directive. Australia was one of the only four abstentions from the recent UNESCO Treaty on Cultural Diversity.

Much of the impetus for measures to protect cultural diversity within Australia arise directly from government efforts to create bilateral Free Trade Agreements.

Those concerned with the preservation and promotion with culture see such agreements as severely damaging to the culture of the smaller countries involved in such agreements. It would also seem likely that those aspects even of the dominant culture that are less easily commercialised will tend to be marginalised and eventually lost.

A central point is that the U.S. does not need to protect its cultural sectors, because there is no prospect of any significant competition from imports. As the Music Council noted:

“To our knowledge, there are no US governmental obstructions to import of Australian cultural product. We do not believe that there were advantages to Australian culture that our negotiators failed to pursue. There simply were none to be had. The difficulties for Australian culture in penetrating the US market are a consequence of its size, self-sufficiency, and obsessively domestic focus. In order to assist entry of Australian product, the US government would have to intervene in favour of Australian producers against US producers. This is hardly likely to occur.”

Possibly the audiovisual productions of large European-based organisations would have more success. EURALVA may then have a different position to the Friends on such agreements.

NB: Seemingly general references actually apply only to Australia. Matters applying to other countries, or the world, are qualified accordingly.