

Committee's public hearings

The Government agrees with this recommendation

In October 1997, the Minister for International Trade requested that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT) hold public hearings to examine Canada's participation in the MAI negotiations. These hearings allowed organizations representing millions of Canadians and thousands of businesses to present their views. The Government has stepped up efforts to engage Canadians on the outstanding issues in the negotiations, and on the concerns brought forward by the Committee's public hearings. The Government will continue to brief the media, speak to nongovernmental organizations and community groups, and provide information to the general public. Engaging Canadians in an open and transparent process should serve to allay concerns and inform Canadians of the many benefits of negotiating an MAI.

The Government's priority has been to get information to the public. Extensive information has been provided to Members of Parliament, opposition critics have been briefed, and numerous press briefings and interviews have been given. Government officials have consulted broadly with the provinces. A list of the organizations consulted to date is attached. Background information on the MAI negotiations and Canada's objectives has been placed on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Web site at www.international.gc.ca.

Recommendation 3

The Government should ensure a process that fully involves the provinces, and that will allow sufficient time for the text available at that time to resolve the benefits of certain provisions, examination by the Committee prior to the signing of any negotiated agreement.

The Government agrees with this recommendation

Re: Provinces

The Government has fully involved the provinces in Canada's negotiation of the MAI. Since the outset of the negotiations in 1995, the provinces have been frequently and consistently consulted. They are debriefed after every negotiating session, copied on all reports, and have access to all negotiating documents. Numerous meetings between federal and provincial trade officials have taken place over the past three years to address issues related to the negotiations. The federal-provincial Trade Ministers' meeting of February 19, 1998, allowed for a thorough discussion of Canada's objectives and ongoing issues. Provinces advised Canada's withdrawal from negotiations.

Re: Parliament

The Government agrees to consult further with the Committee on the negotiations towards a potential Multinational Agreement on Investment. The Government will also continue to make public new versions of the MAI consultation of draft working texts as they become available from the negotiating process.

Recommendation 4