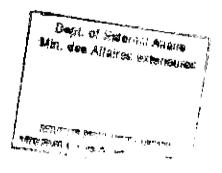


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REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ON FREE TRADE ADVERTISING-FOCUS GROUPS JUNE 1988

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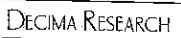
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I. INTRODUCTION

This memorandum presents the results of focus group testing of public reactions to various alternative concepts for prospective Government of Canada print advertisements dealing with the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA). An Appendix to this memorandum identifies the different advertisements tested in the groups with reference to the headlines in the ad.

Two groups were conducted in each of Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax, and Montreal, between May 31 and June 2. One group in each city consisted of participants drawn from the general population and the other group was recruited from among that segment of the population with annual household incomes over \$40,000. The purpose of the groups was to ascertain public reaction to the alternative concepts tested, as well as to the idea of federal government advertising providing information about the Canada-U.S. FTA.

We will begin by briefly summarizing our conclusions and recommendations as derived from the focus group research. This will be followed by a review of group participants' views on the idea of federal government advertising pertaining to the FTA issue, and on each of the specific ads tested. This report first discusses those ads which we are recommending that the government proceed with.

Overview of Conclusions and Recommendations

It is Decima's view that proceeding with print advertisements dealing with the Free Trade Agreement entails a certain amount of risk for the government. The group results reveal, however, that this is mitigated to a considerable extent by the fact that people do not feel they know enough about the FTA and what it might mean. People clearly are interested in receiving more information about the FTA and what it will mean for them, their region and the country.

To be effective, however, the focus group research suggests it will be imperative for any government advertising to be moderate and informational in tone. People want and even expect information about what Canada-U.S. free trade will mean and many believe that



the government has a legitimate role and even an obligation to provide such information to the public. In short, group participants want to be informed about free trade with the U.S., but they do not want to be "sold" on it.

Therefore, the key themes emerging from the testing are the need for advertisements which are perceived as moderate, informational and balanced. This is not to suggest that there is a demand or expectation that the government should present both sides of the debate through any advertisements. Rather, what the public seem to be saying is that the advertisements should reflect a recognition that some adjustments may be required. Moreover, people are anxious to receive information about such issues and that the government is prepared for and committed to dealing with such adjustments.

The real challenge and opportunity facing the government is to select and run those advertisements which clearly convey not only information, but an opportunity for two-way communication. Given the level of uncertainty and lack of knowledge about what Canada-U.S. free trade will mean, the group discussions suggest that it will be important for government advertising to be seen as presenting an opportunity for

Canadians to seek information, clarification and answers to their questions, rather than as solely a promotional or advocacy exercise. Conveying through the ads the ability for people to call for information and to ask questions and discuss things they do not understand about Canada-U.S. free trade will be key.

With these considerations in mind, Decima recommends that the government consider proceeding with the following three advertisements in sequence:

- 1. Ad#3 "Free Trade Opportunity Conference"
- 2. Ad#4 "Information About Free Trade"

3. Ad#9 - "Free Trade: We Should Know What It's All About".

These ads are likely to be most effective in accomplishing the government's objectives, while minimizing the amount of risk associated with this type of government advertising. The first two ads are recommended because the research shows that they

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meet the critical criteria of being perceived as informative and as conveying to some extent the opportunity for two-way communication. Ad #9 is recommended because in our view it is the more advocacy-oriented ad which may entail the least amount of risk. At the same time, the group discussions show that this ad conveys a basic message -- "We Should Know What It's All About" -- which the public appears to accept and which in fact "draws in" the reader. It is not without some faults, however, and some specific suggestions as to appropriate revisions are outlined below.

We recognize that logistical and timing constraints necessitate that the "Conference Ad" must be run first and that it is also primarily directed toward a business audience. The "Information About Free Trade" ad would provide an effective follow-up, as it too is perceived as informational, relatively neutral and balanced. It is also seen as relating more directly to the concerns and interests of individual Canadians as distinct from business.

The remainder of this memorandum reviews the group reactions to each advertisement in more detail, along with overall impressions of the idea of government print advertisements dealing with Canada-U.S. free trade.

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II. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE IDEA OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING DEALING WITH CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE

Group participants' views regarding the degree of acceptability of federal government advertising dealing with Canada-U.S. free trade stems from an over-riding concern for information. There appeared to be a consensus among a majority of participants that government advertisements are an appropriate and legitimate expenditure of public funds. If done in a balanced way, the advertising was thought to be likely to contribute to filling a perceived void of information.

In fact, consistent references were made by respondents in most groups to the notion that the federal government has an obligation to inform Canadians about free trade. Such an obligation, however, was also thought to entail an equally important obligation on the part of the government to present information to Canadians about "both sides" of free trade -- the opportunities and the potential problems. Representative comments articulating this view include the following:

- o The government has an obligation to ask for our opinions but doesn't have an obligation to publish a one-sided point of view.
- o If they show both sides, it's fine, but it needs to be balanced though.
- o I would like to see information on government plans for dealing with the problems of free trade.

The issue of when the appropriate timing for such advertising would be was also addressed. Most participants did not have any problem with the advertising appearing during the debate in Parliament over the enabling legislation for the Canada-U.S. FTA. To sum up, most people accept as legitimate and appropriate the expenditure of public funds on advertising dealing with Canada-U.S. free trade. It should be recognized, however, that for many people this acceptance appears to be tied to the requirement for advertising which is informational and balanced.



III. ADVERTISEMENTS RECOMMENDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A. Ad#3 -- The Conference Ad

This advertisement emerged along with the "Information About Free Trade" ad as receiving the most positive reception among participants across all groups. Montreal group participants, however, were a bit less receptive to the ad than were others. It was assumed correctly that the conference is aimed at a business audience. Participants recognized that the focus would be on the benefits or opportunities arising from free trade.

While this was seen as worthwhile, there were several criticisms offered. A number of participants, particularly those in the general population groups, wondered, "What's it going to mean for the average person?" They also complained that it could only be attended by business people given that it was held during the day. One way to address these concerns is to include a clear indication in the ad that the conference is for business people in the area in which the conference is being held. Another will be to exercise care in the positioning of the ad in newspapers such that it is "aimed" at the target audience for which it is intended.

The results from the groups also indicate that it will be important to highlight the opportunities for question and answer sessions so that people can not only "explore the opportunities," but also explore the possibilities and imperatives of adjustment that they may face. Making it clear that opportunities will be available for two-way communication between business attendees and the assembled experts on the conference agenda will contribute to meeting the balance test.

B. Ad#4 -- Information About Free Trade

This advertisement was considered the best of all ads shown. It is safe and entails little risk as it is considered to be strictly informative and fairly neutral. The ad is seen as offering people what they want, which is information about free trade, or at least an indication of where they can go to get information. It also has the advantage of involving people in actively obtaining the information and making up their own minds about free trade.



Some people thought this ad was better than the "conference ad" because it was more informative and was considered to be directed toward and relevant to all Canadians and not just business people. This is reflected in comments by the general population group participants such as:

- o This one is better.
- One is gaining information in this one while the last one appealed to only one segment of the population and
- This one pretty well covers everything. You're getting information, not just a sales pitch.

It also passes the essential test of balance as many people noted that the ad recognizes that adjustment might be required and that information about this aspect of what free trade with the U.S. means for Canada would also be available.

Of particular significance is the fact that people viewed this advertisement as not only balanced, but also neutral. That is, several comments were made indicating a perception that this advertisement is not partisan or political, but rather seems to be an advertisement by the "institution" of the federal government. Since there appeared to be a belief in the legitimacy of expenditure by the institution of the federal government on advertisements providing information about free trade, the "Information About Free Trade" ad was seen as especially appropriate.

One criticism that was offered by some relates to accessibility. That is, while people want to be actively involved in making a personal decision about Canada-U.S. free trade, many do not want to be inconvenienced or at least say they do not want to call an 800 number or write the government to get the information. A possible response by the government is to make the pamphlets available for pick-up at specified locations in major centres across the country.

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C. Ad#9 -- "Free Trade: We Should Know What It's All About"

This ad was correctly perceived by many group participants as more advocacy oriented than informational, in contrast to the two ads discussed above. In Decima's view, this advertisement is preferable to the business third-party spokesman advertisement as a more advocacy-oriented message or advertisement.

It emerges from the testing as having the effect of "drawing in the reader" and was described by one Vancouver group participant as "a great teaser." It also conveys through the headline a message that most people concur with and find credible. On the other hand, some Montreal and Halifax participants found it to have a political ring to it. With some modifications, it would likely constitute an effective, more advocacyoriented compliment to the other ads recommended above that are more informational.

In addition to a credible and attractive headline, the ad was positively perceived as somewhat balanced in light of the reference to the fact that "Sure, there will be some problems, some adjustments to be made. That's why the agreement is being phased in over 10 years."

Where some revisions may be required is in generalizing the message about how free trade will affect each province, beyond the single, major industries highlighted in the ad. A number of people said they were attracted by the headline, but were left disappointed by the body of the text of the ad. In each city in which groups were conducted, people felt that there was excessive emphasis on one industry.

For instance, in Ontario, people felt that the ad proceeded too quickly from the general statement in the headline to an exclusive focus on one industry. An indication should be provided as to a broader range of industry benefits and effects besides that of the major, individual sectors emphasized. Benefits for small and medium sized businesses, and not just the benefits for large scale businesses, were also considered important to emphasize. For instance, it was recognized in Halifax that while free trade may be good for National Sea Products, they also wondered, "What does it mean for the small, inshore fisherman?"

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It may be advisable to revise the advertisement so that it conveys a message of both a range of specific beneficiaries and broader economic benefits. Together, once again, with an indication of where people can call to address questions and concerns they have about free trade, such revisions would in Decima's view contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of this advertisement,

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IV. OTHER ADVERTISEMENTS

A. Ad#7 -- Question and Answer Ad

Apart from some concerns about the ad being too detailed, the overall reception to this ad was reasonably positive. It seems to meet the basic test of balance, in addressing the issue of adjustment or protection for industries.

On the other hand, a number of people thought that more could be done to address some questions of concern which were not contained in the ad submitted for testing. These could include issues such as what the benefits of the free trade deal are for the United States, and answers to questions about whether unemployment insurance, OHIP/health care etc. would be threatened under the FTA. Placing emphasis on some of the potential downsides was seen as important, with one Halifax participant stressing that "You just can't lose if you tell me everything. You just can't lose."

If the ad was implemented, it would be advisable to consider running a series of ads dealing with different questions so as to enhance the "digestibility" of the ad.

One critique which emerged in the Vancouver groups was that some people felt, "The more I get into the ad, the more I think I'm getting sales."

In Decima's view, Ad#9 constitutes a preferred choice over the "Question and Answer Ad" in that it is more succinct, conveys a simple and credible message, and does not have the potential for overloading or confusing the reader which the other ad may have. Nevertheless, reference could be made in those three advertisements that Decima does recommend to the availability of documentation which addresses many of the critical questions and answers of concern.

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B. Ad#8 -- Business Spokesman Ad

The groups confirmed the quantitative research findings that business people are considered to be among the most credible spokespersons on the issue of free trade. The groups also suggest that ads such as those tested would be more effective if a range of business spokespersons were portrayed, drawn from various sectors and from both large and small business.

Stemming from this perceived credibility of business spokespeople, many participants regarded these ads as more of an "endorsement" of the FTA rather than as a "sell job." The particular spokesman portrayed in the ads tested in the Montreal groups was not especially well-received.

Decima's recommendation that implementation of this concept be avoided is based on perceptions of the attendant risk associated with this type of advertisement. It is impossible in the context of the focus group milieu to gauge the type of opposition which could emerge to the federal government paying for advertisements by business spokesmen which raise only one side of the issue. Given the potential risk associated with the business advocate ad and the fact that a workable alternative advertisement emerged in the group testing, we would advocate dropping the third-party advocacy concept (Ad#8) from the list of candidates for execution.

C. Other Advertisements

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The group results suggest that it is appropriate to abandon some of the advertising concepts tested. The "Business and Workers" ad (Ad#2) seemed more relevant to people than did the "Consumers" ad (Ad#1), but even it was considered to be somewhat vague and not informative enough. There was some sense among Montreal participants that the ad was somewhat of a "hard sell." Given that other ads are seen to adequately inform without conveying a sense of "hard sell," Decima would recommend against proceeding with either of Ad#1 or Ad#2.

V. SUMMARY

Decima recommends that if an advertising campaign is launched, three of the advertisements tested be selected for execution, with appropriate revisions as indicated above. These are:

- o Ad#3 -- "Free Trade Opportunity Conference"
- o Ad#4 -- "Information About Free Trade"
- o Ad#5 -- "Free Trade: We Should Know What It's All About."

In our view, these advertisements are likely to be most effective in accomplishing the government's objectives, while keeping the attendant risk at a minimum.



APPENDIX A

FREE TRADE AD TESTING DISCUSSION AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTION

PROCEDURES AND INTRODUCTIONS

- O INTRODUCTION TO FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES
- **O** INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

- O AS YOU KNOW, CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE SIGNED A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT. GENERALLY SPEAKING, WOULD YOU SAY YOU ARE IN FAVOUR OF THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT, OPPOSED TO IT, OR ARE YOU NOT SURE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?
- O ARE YOU EAGER TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WILL MEAN FOR CANADA AND FOR THE REGION OF THE COUNTRY IN WHICH YOU LIVE, OR DOES IT NOT REALLY MATTER TO YOU?
- O I'D NOW LIKE TO SHOW YOU A SERIES OF PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS AND GET YOUR REACTIONS TO THEM. FOR EACH ONE, I'LL DISPLAY THE AD FOR EVERYONE TO LOOK AT AND WILL ALSO DISTRIBUTE PHOTOCOPIES OF EACH AD SO YOU CAN REVIEW THE TEXT AND HAVE A CLOSE UP LOOK AT IT. THEN I'LL ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF IT AND MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ONE...HERE'S THE FIRST ONE....



PART 1 -- PRINT ADS

II. CONSUMER/WORKER ADS

A. "WHAT IT MEANS TO ALBERTA CONSUMERS" - PICTORIAL

NOTE THAT THE AD TALKS ABOUT ALBERTA, BUT THIS IS JUST FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES. THERE WOULD BE ADS DEALING WITH EACH PROVINCE THAT WOULD APPEAR IN PAPERS AND MAGAZINES IN THAT PROVINCE.

- *O WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THIS ADVERTISEMENT? WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN MESSAGE BEING CONVEYED?
- *O IF YOU SAW THIS IN A NEWSPAPER, MAGAZINE OR POSTER, DO YOU THINK IT WOULD ATTRACT YOUR ATTENTION? WOULD YOU READ IT? WHY/WHY NOT?
- *O DO YOU FIND THE AD TO BE INFORMATIVE? DOES IT TELL YOU THE KIND OF THING YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT? DO YOU FEEL IT IS PRESENTED IN A MANNER THAT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND?
- *O DO YOU THINK IT PROVIDES MOST CANADIANS WITH SOMETHING THEY NEED AND THAT THEY HAVE NOT HAD BEFORE?
- *O DOES IT MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU PERSONNALLY? IS THE AD RELEVANT TO YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL? ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE INFORMATION THAT IT PRESENTS OR IS IT NOT OF INTEREST TO YOU? (WHY/WHY NOT?)
- *O IS THE AD BALANCED? DOES IT PRESENT ANY PARTICULAR SIDE OF THE FREE TRADE DEBATE OR DOES IT COME ACROSS AS NEUTRAL OR BALANCED?



- *O DOES IT EXAGGERATE OR USE ADVOCACY LANGUAGE, OR DO YOU SEE IT AS INFORMATIVE?
- * CORE QUESTIONS

B. "WHAT IT MEANS TO ALBERTA BUSINESSES AND WORKERS" - PICTORIAL

- O WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THIS VERSION OF THE AD? WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT IT?
- O WOULD THIS ONE CATCH YOUR ATTENTION? WOULD YOU READ IT?
- O LOOKING AT BOTH OF THESE VERSIONS OF THE AD, WHICH ONE DO YOU THINK WORKS BEST AS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OR PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT?

III. THE CONFERENCE AD

A. DISPLAY THE "ANNOUNCEMENT" AD AND DISTRIBUTE PHOTOCOPIES

- O AFTER OVERALL IMPRESSIONS, ASK:
- O WHO DO YOU SEE AS SPONSORING THIS CONFERENCE? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE IDEA OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPONSORING CONFERENCES TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT?
- O REPEAT CORE QUESTION SERIES -



B. INFORMATION PAMPHLET AD

O REPEAT CORE QUESTION SERIES

THEN SHOW THE TWO ADS TOGETHER -- WHICH IS THE BEST WAY TO ANNOUNCE THE CONFERENCE? (LEAST BIASED)

IV. QUESTION AND ANSWER AD

- O REPEAT CORE QUESTION SERIES
- O REACTIONS TO THE STYLE OF PRESENTATION IN THE AD. IS IT DIGESTIBLE?
- V. BUSINESS SPOKESMAN AD THIRD PARTY
- O SHOW AD
- O REPEAT CORE QUESTIONS
- O DO YOU SEE THE SPOKESMAN DEPICTED HERE AS A CREDIBLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE LIKELY BENEFITS OF THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT?
- **O** PLAY RADIO AD WHICH IS PREFERRED? EASIEST TO UNDERSTAND?
- VI. FREE TRADE HEADLINE AD COPY BLOCK

A. SHOW PRINT AD

- O REPEAT CORE QUESTIONS
- O ANY PARTICULAR REACTIONS TO THE HEADLINE ? TO THE TEXT? DO YOU PERCEIVE ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HEADLINE AND THE TEXT IN TERMS OF TONE AND ADVOCACY?

B. PLAY RADIO SPOT

- O IMPRESSIONS AND REACTIONS?
- O WOULD PEOPLE BE MORE OR LESS ATTENTIVE TO THE RADIO SPOT THAN. THEY WOULD BE TO THE PRINT AD?

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PART II -- ACCEPTABILITY

I. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

- O PUTTING ASIDE CONSIDERATION OF ANY ONE AD FOR THE MOMENT, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE IDEA OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RUNNING PRINT AND/OR RADIO ADVERTISEMENTS DEALING WITH THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT?
- O DO YOU THINK THIS IS A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING, OR DO YOU NOT REALLY CARE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER?
- O IS SUCH ADVERTISING IN YOUR VIEW IMPORTANT AND WORTHWHILE ? DO YOU THINK IT PROVIDES CANADIANS WITH SOMETHING THAT THEY NEED TO KNOW AND WHICH THEY HAVE NOT HAD BEFORE?
- O IN TERMS OF WHEN ADS SUCH AS THESE ARE RUN, WOULD YOU PREFER TO SEE THEM RUN WHILE THE FREE TRADE LEGISLATION IS BEING STILL DEBATED IN PARLIAMENT OR WOULD YOU PREFER TO SEE THEM AFTER THE GOVERNMENT HAS DEBATED AND PASSED THE FREE TRADE LEGISLATION? (WHY/WHY NOT...PROBE THE IDEA OF HAVING INFORMATION DURING THE DEBATE OR AFTER THE FTA HAS BEEN PASSED BY PARLIAMENT)
- O DO YOU THINK THAT THE COST ASSOCIATED WITH ADVERTISING SUCH AS YOU'VE SEEN TONIGHT IS JUSTIFIED OR NOT, AS A SERVICE PROVIDED TO CANADIANS BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

NOW I'D LIKE TO BRIEFLY DISPLAY EACH OF THE PRINT ADS AGAIN AND ASK YOU, FOR EACH ONE, HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PAYING FOR THIS KIND OF ADVERTISEMENT. (SHOW ADS)

- O IF YOU HAD SEEN ADVERTISEMENTS SUCH AS THE ONES WE'VE SHOWN YOU TONIGHT AND THEN HEARD AN OPPONENT OF THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE DEAL SAY OR ASK IN PUBLIC, "WHY SHOULD OUR TAX DOLLARS BE USED FOR THIS," HOW WOULD YOU REACT? WOULD YOU AGREE/ DISAGREE? WHY?
- O IN YOUR VIEW, OVERALL, DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD REACT POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY WERE YOU TO SEE ADVERTISEMENTS SUCH AS THESE FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DEALING WITH THE CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT?

END OF SESSION. THANK RESPONDENTS.



APPENDIX B

The following are the headlines of the advertisements tested in the focus groups conducted in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax.

Ad 1 - "The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement" What it means to Alberta Consumers

Ad 2 - "The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement" What it means to Alberta businesses and workers

Ad 3 - Free Trade Opportunity Conference

Ad 4 - Information about Free Trade

Ad 5 and 6 - *

Ad 7 - "The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement" These questions and answers are provided by the Government of Canada to help Canadians gain a fuller understanding of the Free Trade Agreement.

Ad 8 - "Free Trade" -It will make our forests grow. (Vancouver)
-A great boost for our auto industry. (Toronto)
-It will give our energy industry more power. (Montreal)
-A great catch for our fish industry. (Halifax)

Ad 8 (b) - radio version of the above ad

Ad 9 - Free Trade: We should know what it is all about, because it's going to affect British Columbia.

-Ontario.

-Quebec.

. -Atlantic Canada

Ad 9(b) - radio version of the above ad.

* In Toronto, a radio and print ad of a political endorsement was also tested. The headline for the print ad read, "We already know we can cut the mustard. It's time to spread it around" - John Crosbie





DOCS CA1 EA27 88R22 ENG Report to the Department of External Affairs on free trade advertising focus groups 57867824

