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Strong support for EU and Free Trade Agreement

Australians are expressing strong support for the European Union (EU) particularly the EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) despite negotiations collapsing last year, according to a new survey by the University of Adelaide's Institute of International Trade (IIT).

While the negotiations between the EU and Australia to establish the FTA ceased abruptly in October 2023 owing to then irreconcilable differences, survey results show that this decision does not reflect public opinion.

The survey involved over 1700 Australians and was implemented by Insightfully, a market and social research firm. Over 82 per cent of respondents either strongly or somewhat support the deal, and less than 2 per cent are against it.

"While some media commentary paints the European Union as unpopular, aloof or anti-business, Australians see the EU positively and are very supportive of a trade agreement," says Professor Peter Draper, Executive Director of IIT.

FTAs are treaties between two or more countries designed to reduce or eliminate certain barriers regarding trade and investment, and to facilitate stronger trade and commercial ties between participating countries. They are seen to contribute to greater economic activity and job creation, where Australia currently has 18 FTAs with over 20 countries.

Results from the survey show that 49 per cent of respondents that are voters would have a better opinion of the Labor government if they successfully concluded the FTA with the EU. Twenty-two per cent said there would be no change, and 20 per cent were unsure.

"Results were even more positive when we compared Australians' attitudes towards the EU on 15 different measures, with attitudes towards two of our other main trading partners, the United States and China," Professor Draper says.

On seven measures, Australians rated the EU as significantly (more than 25 net points) more positive than either the US or China, including following international rules, respect for human rights, social progressiveness, responsiveness to climate change, environmental friendliness, political stability, and transparency.

"In each case, Australians' ratings of the European Union were the most similar to how they saw themselves. The EU was seen as a more reliable trading partner and as closer to Australian values than the US," Professor Draper says.

The study showed that when Australians learn more about the FTA, support increases from 82 per cent to 87 per cent, while the group that experiences the largest increase in support is "undecided voters", whose net support rises by 14 per cent.

"One interesting aspect was that while support for the EU and China was broadly similar across voting intentions, support for the US was sharply differentiated," Professor Draper says.

"Coalition voters were +55 net favourable towards the US, Labor voters were +19 net favourable, while Green voters were -21 net favourable."

The survey also asked about concerns that the FTA would restrict Geographical Indicators (GIs) — labels on products identifying their origin — as much of the media commentary has focused on this issue.

"Results showed that 30 per cent were definitely aware of the issue, 26 per cent were probably aware of the issue, and surprisingly there was lower awareness in regional areas," Professor Draper explains.

Professor Draper notes the study reveals some other interesting results about how Australians see themselves: "While not the focus of the poll, I was very encouraged to see that 88 per cent of Australians saw themselves as being 'open to trade' with only 4 per cent disagreeing with this."

The international trade survey is available [here](#).

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