

Albanese rejects US trade complaints on eve of Trump's Liberation Day

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President Donald Trump has formally adopted long-standing US trade grievances over Australia's subsidised medicines scheme, agricultural biosecurity regulations and rules forcing tech giants to pay local news organisations for content, two days before he has promised to impose sweeping tariffs globally.

The US Trade Representative overnight released its annual Foreign Trade Barriers Report, which takes aim at what American officials regard as de facto protectionist measures discriminating against US exports.



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has rejected US trade complaints from the Trump administration. **AP, Alex Ellinghausen**

While the report is usually released about this time of the year, the 2025 version is even more politically loaded as it comes on the eve of Trump's "Liberation Day" [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5lnvd>], when the president has vowed to hit trading partners with so-called reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for tariffs and other trade barriers on US goods.

The Albanese government is on high alert that pharmaceutical and beef exports are at most risk of being hit with tariffs, but is yet to get a firm indication on whether Australian goods will have duties imposed on them or be spared, amid mixed messages over how far Trump will take his trade war.

Campaigning in Adelaide, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese rejected US complaints.

"I have very clearly indicated Australia is not negotiating over the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. We are not negotiating over the news bargaining code. We will not undermine our biosecurity," Albanese said.

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“These are the issues that we have been discussing with the US administration. Those discussions are ongoing. I want to see a constructive outcome, but what I will not do is undermine our national interest.”

While Albanese has not been able to secure a third phone call with the president, the government is using golf legend Greg Norman as one of its go-betweens with Trump and his administration as it tries to fend off the threat of tariffs.

Australia and the US have a free trade agreement that is now 20 years old and eliminated tariffs, but the report rehashes irritants that US trade officials have long complained about.

One of these is the mandatory news bargaining code, which requires US social media and search firms to negotiate deals with Australian news organisations and pay them for content published on their platforms.

While Google is continuing to pay Australian media outlets, including Nine Entertainment, publisher of *The Australian Financial Review*, Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, let its deals expire last year.

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Meta's refusal to renew the agreements prompted the Albanese government to consider tightening the rules of the bargaining code, including financially penalising designated platforms that do not reach or renew commercial deals.

But those changes remain on hold amid efforts by tech billionaires such as Zuckerberg and, most publicly, X owner Elon Musk to build influence with Trump.

The report updates its entry around the news bargaining code to reflect the Albanese government's planned changes, saying, "The United States continues to monitor this issue."

This year's report again states that the US is monitoring Canberra's consideration of locally made content requirements for streaming video services such as Netflix, to "ensure Australia's compliance with its FTA obligations".

The report also repeats familiar complaints over biosecurity regulations that lock out exports of US-grown beef, pork, cooked poultry, apples and pears to Australia.

It also reiterates US gripes over the operation of patent rules under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which heavily subsidises prescriptions for patients by controlling the price that the government pays a drug maker for medicines.

Under a section headlined "investment barriers", the trade representative chides the NSW government for failing to act on a parliamentary committee recommendation to compensate shareholders, including US investors, over the cancellation of a coal mining exploration licence

[<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/top-trump-official-presses-australia-on-coal-compensation-20250324-p5llym>]. At least six American university endowment and pension funds were among US institutional investors that owned 30 per cent of Australian-listed miner NuCoal Resources.

NuCoal, a coal exploration and development company, had its coking coal exploration licence for mining at Doyles Creek in central west NSW cancelled in 2014 in response to a corruption finding.

The NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption found in 2013 that then-state mining minister Ian Macdonald acted corruptly in 2008 when he granted the licence to its former owner, Doyles Creek Mining.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer raised NuCoal's plight in a phone call with Trade Minister Don Farrell. NuCoal's chairman Gordon Galt and some representatives of US investors are in Washington this week to meet with relevant stakeholders in the administration and Congress.

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