

Preface and acknowledgements

After the Uruguay Round reforms, the GATT and related agreements administered by the WTO have brought increasing trade liberalization and associated gains from increased efficiency in production and consumption. At the same time, the strengthening of trade rules in the WTO has increased the scope for disputes over interpretations of more extensive and complicated agreements and raised the profile of the dispute settlement process, one of the more far-sighted innovations.

One of the unforeseen consequences of the comprehensive WTO agreements has been controversy over risk. New agreements on technical standards and quarantine are designed to prevent these regulations from being used as surrogate protection as tariffs and other measures are dismantled. But changing national regulations to meet international standards introduces non-economic risks which need to be assessed and managed. Several high profile, controversial trade disputes have drawn attention to the problems associated with risk. Experts invited to give opinions to dispute panels have, if anything, fuelled the controversy.

Because risk and the interpretation of WTO agreements have become contentious in international trade relations, the Centre for the Practice of International Trade convened a two-day meeting at the Melbourne Business School, in February 1999, on 'Accounting for Risk in Trade Agreements'. The papers presented at the seminar are collected in this volume, with a final paper which highlights the key points made during the discussions.

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