

# Environmental Obligations in Free Trade Agreements and Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** Free trade agreements mainly refer to legally binding contracts formulated by two or more countries to achieve economic integration and eliminate trade barriers and free trade agreements are conducive to the development of international trade and the steady growth of national economy. In free trade agreements, attention should be paid not only to economic and trade development, but also to environmental protection. In particular, free trade should not be at the cost of destroying the environment, nor should it hinder free trade under the pretext of environmental protection. In order to coordinate and effectively handle the relationship between free trade and environmental protection, the environmental chapter of the Free Trade Agreement emerged in due time as the main response method to fulfill the environmental obligations in the Free Trade Agreement. It not only effectively coordinates the relationship between free trade and environmental protection, but also provides a powerful boost to the development of free trade and environmental protection.

**Keywords:** Free Trade Agreement; Environmental Chapter; Environmental Protection

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## Introduction

Free trade is a double-edged sword for the environment. Free trade may bring about environmental pollution while expanding production; However, it is also conducive to the dissemination of environmentally friendly technologies, thereby improving productivity. In the face of this situation, it is necessary to rationally design and regulate environmental issues in the content of free trade agreements. In particular, it is of practical significance for the development of free trade and environmental protection to set up special chapters in free trade agreements that clearly specify the purpose, principles and measures of environmental protection. Therefore, this paper mainly analyzes the relationship between free trade and environmental protection, and explores the current situation and development trend of the environmental chapter in free trade agreements.

## 1. The relationship between free trade and environmental protection

The main purpose of free trade is to promote the development of human society and economy, and optimize the allocation of global resources, so as to improve people's per capita income and living standards. In the process of promoting free trade, ensuring a good ecological environment and natural environment is an important foundation, and achieving sustainable development of the environment is also a prerequisite. Only by fully protecting and utilizing natural resources can we promote the healthy development of free trade, and only by implementing scientific environmental regulations can we bring more impetus and support to the sustainable development of free trade on the basis of environmental protection. Among them, the implementation of environmental regulation in the import place is conducive to protecting the ecological environment of the import place, and more conducive to ensuring the product quality of the import place, which also puts forward certain requirements for the production process of the export place, which is of great benefit to the high-quality development of free trade. At the same time, the implementation of environmental regulations

and the advocacy of environmental concepts will help promote the development of environmental protection enterprises and industries. However, if the formulation of environmental protection measures is not scientific enough, it is likely to bring some resistance to free trade. Especially in recent years, people's awareness of environmental protection has been gradually enhanced, and more countries have formulated sound environmental protection measures and regulations. However, due to the different economic strength of each country, the environmental protection measures formulated are also different, which also led to the emergence of "green barriers", which also hindered the development of free trade to a certain extent. In the process of global economic development, different countries have different levels of productivity and attach importance to environmental protection, provide different environmental protection technologies and funds, and set different environmental standards worldwide. Setting a globally unified environmental standard will not only indirectly improve the market access threshold, but also may affect the competition of relevant enterprises and products in various countries. In addition, free trade also plays an important role and has a positive impact on environmental protection. Free trade is not only conducive to promoting the optimization and upgrading of the national industrial structure, thus promoting the sustainable development of the country, enhancing the national economic strength and improving the national living conditions, but also promoting people to have higher requirements for the environment, encouraging people to actively use green products and green technologies, thus effectively reducing environmental pollution. It can be seen that free trade can bring certain economic and environmental benefits.

## **2. Analysis on the current situation of environmental chapter in free trade agreement**

At present, although all countries in the world attach great importance to environmental protection, due to their different interests and different understanding of environmental standards, the environmental chapter of the Free Trade Agreement mainly starts from their own interests, and there are still some abstract and vague problems.

Environmental protection concerns the survival and development of human beings, and more importantly, the common interests of mankind. In the process of global economic development, environmental protection is an important theme that cannot be ignored. To this end, international organizations have issued many international environmental legal documents, which have made certain contributions to global environmental protection and sustainable economic development. At the same time, the environmental chapter of the Free Trade Agreement points out the direction for trade development and environmental protection. The environmental chapter is different from the subsidiary environmental cooperation agreement in the free trade agreement and the environmental chapter belongs to an independent special chapter. With the development of trade and economy, countries have gradually strengthened their emphasis on environmental protection. The environmental chapter in free trade agreements has been constantly improved and improved and many countries have signed special environmental chapters in free trade agreements. Although there is no unified standard for the form and content of the environmental chapter, the content covered in the environmental chapter has gradually diversified and played an important role in environmental protection. However, many countries still haven't set up the environmental chapter due to economic considerations, which leads to certain difficulties in formulating the environmental chapter of free trade. In addition, the environmental chapter of free trade also faces many problems, such as the lack of clear positioning and goals, the lack of strong motivation, and the lack of capacity in some countries, which lead to a long way to go in implementing the environmental chapter.

## **3. The development trend of environmental chapter in free trade agreement**

Although there are many difficulties in setting up the environmental chapter in free agreements, many countries have gradually considered and accepted the environmental chapter in order to obtain trade opportunities. Especially in the face of the clear environmental protection position of some large countries and countries, which requires that the free trade agreement should be set up with an environmental chapter in order to reach a free trade agreement, which has promoted many countries to sign free trade agreements containing environmental chapters for trade cooperation and has also promoted the content of environmental chapters to

become increasingly rich, and the number of free trade agreements containing environmental chapters has gradually increased. At the same time, with the leading role of major countries and the growing awareness of global environmental protection, the scope of environmental chapters in free trade agreements has been gradually expanded, the terms have been continuously refined, and environmental obligations have become more specific. In particular, the environmental chapter in the free trade agreement pays more attention to public participation and information disclosure, which effectively improves the operability and effectiveness of the environmental chapter. On this basis, the free trade policy has gradually improved the environmental dispute settlement mechanism by setting up the environmental chapter, which has provided important help for the benign operation of the environmental chapter. In addition, the setting of environmental chapters in free trade agreements is conducive to promoting international environmental cooperation. In particular, environmental protection is not only the responsibility of one country, but also the obligation of all countries in the world. With the help of the environmental chapter in the free trade agreement, it can not only improve the feasibility of international environmental cooperation, but also effectively solve many global environmental problems.

## Conclusion

To sum up, trade and environment are two major issues that cannot be ignored in the process of social development, and are also two important factors related to human survival and development. How to achieve trade development on the basis of environmental protection is an important issue at present, especially the purpose of trade freedom and environmental protection is to improve people's quality of life, and is for the benign development of mankind. Therefore, only by exploring new methods and ideas for coordinating free trade and environmental protection can we promote the coordinated development and common progress of trade and environment.

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