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Singapore FTA changes echo TPP on ISDS, temporary workers and government procurement

"The [report](#) of the government-dominated Joint Standing Committee on Treaties released yesterday on amendments to the Singapore FTA supports changes that are bad precedents for other trade agreements," Dr Patricia Ranald Convener of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network said today.

Dr Ranald said that community groups welcomed additional specific exclusions in the ISDS chapter that were not in the TPP, which mean that foreign corporations will be prevented from suing governments for millions in compensation for regulation not only on tobacco, but for regulation on the PBS, Medicare, therapeutic goods, gene technology regulation, indigenous culture and the decisions of the Foreign Investment Review Board. But she said that this begs the question about other types of government regulation, for example regulation on the environment or labour rights, which have not been specifically excluded from legal action by foreign corporations. She said that the general safeguards for other regulation [reflect those in the TPP](#) and are inadequate.

Dr Ranald noted that, like the TPP, the amendments expanded the numbers of vulnerable temporary migrant workers and removed labour market testing, which would have tested whether local workers were available.

"Multiple scandalous [reports](#) of the exploitation of such workers has led the government to abolish the Visa 457 scheme, and say that labour market testing will be reintroduced. The amendment to expand the numbers of temporary workers and to abolish labour market testing shows that these workers are still being used as [bargaining chips](#) in deals made behind closed doors," said Dr Ranald.

Dr Ranald welcomed the criticism by Labor members on the committee of the inclusion of SDS and the removal of labour market testing for vulnerable temporary workers and their call for independent assessments of the costs and benefits of trade agreements.

Dr Ranald said the amendments also expand access by Singaporean companies to state government procurement at a time when Commonwealth and state government [procurement rules](#) are changing to enable consideration of the economic benefit for local firms in government procurement.

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