



**AFTINET**  
Australian Fair Trade  
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The Hon. Simon Birmingham  
Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

June 24, 2019

Dear Minister,

**Re. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in Melbourne June 28-July 3, 2019**

As you may know, AFTINET is a network of community organisations that has advocated for fair trade through community education and submissions to government for the last 20 years. We support greater transparency and accountability in trade negotiations and for trade agreements that are consistent with human rights, labour rights and environmental sustainability, and that do not restrict the right of governments to regulate in the public interest.

This letter is endorsed by 52 organisations that together represent millions of Australians.

Your government is currently negotiating a new trade agreement with 15 other countries from the Asia Pacific region. These are China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the 10 ASEAN countries, which cover half of the world's population. We have serious concerns about the impact the RCEP could have on our democracy, and on human rights, workers' rights and the environment in Australia and across the region.

The high level of secrecy surrounding the RCEP negotiations has prevented genuine democratic debate. Public scrutiny of the RCEP has been stifled by the refusal to release negotiation texts and to provide more meaningful opportunities for public and civil society input.

[Leaked negotiation texts](#) show that the RCEP could include [Investor-State Dispute Settlement \(ISDS\)](#) provisions that allow international corporations to sue governments over domestic laws and policies, and provisions that could [extend medicine monopolies](#), increase the number of [temporary workers facing exploitation](#), and [restrict the regulation of essential services](#).

Australia is hosting the [26th round](#) of RCEP negotiations in Melbourne from June 28 to July 3, 2019. This provides an opportunity for the Australian government to show leadership by committing to improve transparency and accountability in the negotiations and by ensuring damaging provisions are removed from the agreement.

We are seeking commitments from you on the following issues in the RCEP negotiations.

## 1) **Process of the negotiations**

- Australian submissions and materials relevant to negotiations will be made public
- regular consultations with civil society groups about the negotiations
- release of draft texts
- tabling in Parliament of the completed text and an independent national interest assessment of economic, health, gender, environmental and regional impacts of the completed text **before** the text is signed
- Parliament to debate and vote on the treaty text as well as the implementing legislation.

## 2) **Content of the agreement**

- no Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions which allow foreign investors to sue governments over domestic law or policy
- no removal of labour market testing for vulnerable temporary workers
- no undermining or influencing of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, no extension of monopolies on medicines either through patent extensions or data exclusivity periods of medicines or biologic medicines
- no privatisation or deregulation of public services, and no reduction in the right of Australian governments to regulate and re-regulate in the national interest
- no restrictions on Commonwealth and State policies on government procurement that benefit small and medium local enterprises, benefit indigenous peoples, protect ethical standards, promote industry development and maintain the industry capability programme
- no undermining of anti-dumping provisions and no limits on the right of the Commonwealth to regulate in the interest of public welfare or in relation to safe products
- the inclusion of labour and environment chapters with enforceable and internationally-agreed recognised labour and environmental standards.

We request a meeting with you to discuss these issues.

This letter is endorsed by the 52 organisations listed in the attachment.

Thanks for considering this request and we look forward to your reply.



Dr Patricia Ranald  
Convenor, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network

## **Attachment 1: 32 National and 20 state organisations**

### **National Organisations**

1. Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
2. Australian Conservation Foundation
3. Public Health Association of Australia
4. Civil Liberties Australia
5. Australian Council of Trade Unions
6. Australian Education Union (Federal Office)
7. Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU)
8. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)
9. Australian Services Union National
10. Electrical Trades Union National
11. Community and Public Sector Union - SPSF
12. Finance Sector Union of Australia
13. National Tertiary Education Industry Union
14. United Voice
15. The Music Trust
16. The Australia Institute
17. ActionAid Australia
18. AID/ WATCH
19. CARITAS Australia
20. Jubilee Australia
21. People's Health Movement Australia
22. Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA
23. Friends of the Earth Australia
24. FoodWatch
25. GeneEthics
26. Greenpeace Australia
27. Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Peace & Justice Centre
28. Pax Christi Australia
29. St Columbans Mission Society Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice
30. Sisters of Charity
31. The Grail Global Justice Network
32. SEARCH Foundation

### **State and Regional Organisations**

1. Asian women at Work (NSW)
2. Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (NSW)
3. Council of Retired Union Members Association (NSW)
4. Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace (NSW)
5. Presentation Sisters Queensland
6. Presentation Sisters Wagga
7. Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (NSW)
8. Unfolding Futures (NSW)
9. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union NSW Branch
10. Maritime Union of Australia, SA Branch

11. Newcastle Trades Hall Council (Hunter Unions)
12. NSW Teachers Federation
13. NSW Retired Teachers Association
14. NSW Nurses and Midwives Association
15. South Coast Labour Council
16. Unions ACT
17. Unions NSW
18. Unions SA
19. Unions WA
20. Victorian Trades Hall Council