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MEDIA RELEASE

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JSCOT Committee report on RCEP acknowledges deep flaws, but supports implementation

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) has released its [Report 196](#) on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) between Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, South Korea and the 10 ASEAN countries including Myanmar and the Philippines.

“The government-dominated majority report acknowledged key issues raised in public submissions, including the brutal military regime in Myanmar, lack of commitments to human rights, labour rights and environmental standards, and the [failure to exempt aged care from the deregulatory rules of the agreement](#), which could restrict improved regulation of aged care as recommended by the Royal Commission,” Dr Patricia Ranald, AFTINET Convenor, said today.

“Despite these deep flaws, the majority report ignored proposals that the government seek changes to the agreement to address these issues and recommended that the enabling legislation proceed,” said Dr Ranald.

The report recommended that the Government continue to pursue the restoration of democratic rule in Myanmar as a priority, and consider making a written declaration to this effect at the time of RCEP ratification, and that the Government pursue the inclusion of labour, human rights and environmental provisions within the RCEP when it is reviewed in two years (p. xv).

“We welcome the report’s acknowledgement that there has been no clear explanation of why health care and childcare are excluded from the rules of the agreement when aged care has not been excluded, and that ‘such inconsistencies give rise to public concern, and it would be better if they were avoided’ (p.27). We will continue to press for aged care to be clearly excluded from the agreement,” said Dr Ranald.

The Labor committee members’ critical remarks supported a declaration on Myanmar, and supported the pursuit of labour, human rights and environmental provisions within the RCEP. They also noted the ambiguity about aged care and went further by asking the government to confirm in writing that the RCEP does not restrict the government’s ability to regulate aged care. Labor also noted the lack of independent evaluation of the costs and benefits of the RCEP. They noted that Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) was not included in the RCEP, but could be considered in the two-year review, and argued that it should be opposed (pp59-66).

The Green’s critical remarks noted all of the above flaws, expressed deep concern at the lack of transparency and genuine community consultation, and argued that the enabling legislation should not proceed (pp.55-57).

“We welcome the critical remarks from Labor and the Greens, and will continue to seek delay of the enabling legislation pending amendments to the agreement to address these flaws,” said Dr Ranald.

AFTINET’s submission to the JSCOT inquiry is [here](#).

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