



# Trade Justice Bulletin

## December 2021

*Inside this edition:*

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Dr. Deborah Gleeson at the AFTINET 2021 AGM](#)
3. [Sydney and Melbourne activists rally against Big Pharma greed](#)
4. [‘Each-way bet’: Trade Minister declines to co-sponsor waiver on COVID vaccine monopolies](#)
5. [Trade Minister warned of ‘catastrophic failure’ at WTO during Omicron outbreak](#)
6. [Petition: Carers of the World Vs. COVID Criminals](#)
7. [Fundraiser to expose Big Pharma’s misinformation](#)
8. [Campaign win: Australia cuts ties with Energy Charter Treaty \(ECT\)](#)
9. [AFTINET in the news](#)

### 1. Introduction

Dear Members,

This month, we were hoping to bring you some big news on the proposal to waive vaccine monopolies at the WTO. Instead, the decision has been delayed even further (after more than one year of campaigning!) because the global Omicron outbreak caused the postponement of a face-to-face meeting of Ministers from WTO member countries.

But negotiations on the waiver will continue on-line. We are keeping up the pressure on the Trade Minister to ensure he keeps his word and does not cave into Big Pharma interests. AFTINET activists also made sure that Big Pharma and the rich countries blocking the life-saving proposal heard our message loud and clear: “no profiteering during a pandemic!” We urge you to sign the [nurses petition to the UN](#) to investigate the failure to support the waiver as a violation of human rights.

AFTINET relies on your support to continue our campaigns. If you have not already done so, you can renew your AFTINET membership [here](#), donate [here](#) or buy the unique AFTINET 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cloth banners or T-Towels with Wilcox and Tandberg cartoons [here](#).

Thank you, and keep safe.

*The AFTINET Team.*

## 2. Dr. Deborah Gleeson on vaccine equity and trade at the AFTINET 2021 AGM

More than 70 trade justice activists joined us at the AFTINET 2021 AGM to hear our guest speaker, **Dr Deborah Gleeson**, talk about the campaign to waive monopolies on COVID vaccines and the next steps the world must take to ensure vaccine equity.

We would like to thank Deborah for joining us to deliver such an informative presentation. You can [watch the recording of Deborah’s presentation here](#).

## 3. Sydney and Melbourne vaccine equity activists tell Big Pharma: “No profiteering during a pandemic!”

Across the globe, vaccine equity activists mobilised to tell the WTO to lift intellectual property monopolies on life-saving COVID19 vaccines. In Sydney and Melbourne, AFTINET supporters rallied in front of **Pfizer Australia’s HQ** and the **German Consulate** to deliver our message loud and clear: “No profiteering during a pandemic!”



Despite huge global support for the proposal to lift vaccine monopolies at the WTO, a handful of rich countries like Germany, the EU, the UK and Switzerland are still acting in the interests of Big Pharma rather than taking urgent action to allow low-income nations to ramp-up production of the vaccine

We were proud to stand with **Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)**, **Oxfam Australia**, **Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA**, **Amnesty International Australia**, **Action Aid Australia**, **Friends of the Earth Australia**, **Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF)**, **Sum Of Us**, **Public Health Association of Australia**, and **Public Services International (PSI)** at these rallies to shine a spotlight on global vaccine inequity.

#### 4. 'Each-way bet': Trade Minister declines to co-sponsor waiver on COVID vaccine monopolies

Just before the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** was about to meet, we found out that the Trade Minister, **Dan Tehan**, despite announcing support for the proposal to lift intellectual property monopolies on vaccines, would not agree to co-sponsor the proposal.

Despite more than 64 countries signing on as co-sponsors, **DFAT** revealed in Senate estimates that “the Government has decided that, rather than attaching itself” to a specific proposal, “it's going to focus its efforts... on encouraging the key players to find convergence” and to “encourage both [camps] to show flexibility with a view to ensuring that we can have a consensus outcome”, rather than co-sponsoring the waiver on vaccines monopolies.

AFTINET Convenor **Dr Patricia Ranald** described this position as an “each way bet”, arguing *“Australia must use its influence to support the waiver for low-income countries where millions are dying while more infectious variants like Delta develop. Australia still has time to become a co-sponsor to the proposal.”*

To read more about the ‘each way bet’, [take a look at this feature](#) in The Guardian.

#### 5. Trade Minister warned of ‘catastrophic failure’ at WTO during Omicron outbreak

Just as the WTO Ministerial Meeting was scheduled to meet in person on **November 30** to decide on a waiver of intellectual property monopolies on vaccines, a new Omicron strain took hold across the globe, preventing many delegations from attending the meeting.

Delayed until further notice, the postponed WTO Ministerial Meeting exposes the shocking failure of the WTO to agree on sharing vaccine knowledge and know-how with low-income countries. For over one year, low-income countries have been calling for the waiver, with just a handful of wealthy nations blocking the proposal.

Ahead of the delayed meeting, AFTINET and allied organisations [wrote to the Trade Minister, Dan Tehan](#), saying that the new strain of the virus is a direct result of vaccination rates below 5% in African low-income countries. We urged him to immediately withdraw support for a parallel WTO draft statement on trade and health (which does not include the proposal to temporarily waive intellectual property monopolies on vaccines) and instead *“strongly support the TRIPS Waiver to avoid a catastrophic failure.”*

Now, negotiations on the waiver to lift vaccine monopolies will take place in online meetings on **December 10 and 16**. Despite the Omicron outbreak showing the urgent need to lift vaccine monopolies, a handful of countries continue to hamper discussions, while pharmaceutical companies continue to lobby against the proposal.

Read our letter to the Minister [here](#).

## 6. Petition: Carers of the World Vs. COVID Criminals

Unions representing nurses from across the globe need your solidarity! They need **100,000 signatures** to support their call for the UN to investigate WTO member states for blocking the waiver on vaccine monopolies.

The call to the UN notes that the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** recently sent letters to members of the WTO, which concluded that: “States have a collective responsibility to use all available means to facilitate faster access to vaccines, including by introducing a temporary waiver of relevant intellectual property rights under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (**TRIPS Agreement**)”

The nurses’ letter to the the **UN Human Rights Council** declares:

*“It is now clear: Continued opposition to the TRIPS waiver is resulting in the violation of human rights of peoples across the world.”*

*“We urge you to urgently undertake a mission to the World Trade Organization to examine the facts set out in this petition. These countries have violated our rights and the rights of our patients — and caused the loss of countless lives — of nurses and other caregivers and those we have cared for.”*

Sign the petition [here](#).

## 7. Fundraiser to expose Big Pharma’s misinformation



To help continue our campaign to lift intellectual property monopolies on COVID19 vaccines, you can [make a donation](#) to AFTINET’s festive season fundraiser.

By donating to the campaign, you will be helping us to:

- 🔍 Monitor Big Pharma’s push-back
- 📣 Develop campaigning and advocacy materials on trade justice
- 📄 Conduct research and investigation on trade justice
- 💬 Hold meetings with parliamentarians about vaccine equity and trade justice

Unlike the Big Pharma lobby, we are not bankrolled by multinational corporations or wealthy corporate executives. Instead, we rely on the grass-roots support of thousands of supporters who believe in trade justice.

Make a donation [here](#).

## 8. Campaign win: Australia cuts ties with Energy Charter Treaty (ECT)

In a significant step forward in the campaign against **Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS)**, Australia has [announced its withdrawal](#) from its signatory status to the **Energy Charter Treaty (ECT)**.

The ECT is an investment agreement that allows fossil-fuel companies to sue governments in international tribunals for climate action policies. Australia signed the ECT in 1994, but never ratified the agreement. The withdrawal removes the possibility of any future ratification or use of the agreement.

AFTINET has advocated withdrawal from such treaties for many years. During the 2020 DFAT Review of Australia's Bilateral investment Treaties, [AFTINET argued](#) that ISDS clauses should be excluded from all of Australia's trade and investment treaties.

Some Australian companies in joint ventures with British or European companies have been involved in ISDS cases using the ECT, relying on the ECT full membership of those countries. These include Aura Energy Ltd, an Australian company also listed in the UK, which threatened a [claim](#) under the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) for US \$1.8 billion compensation from the Swedish government [for its decision to phase out uranium mining](#) for environmental reasons.

Australia's withdrawal from the ECT comes amid [major debate](#) between the signatories of the ECT about 'modernising' the treaty to protect governments' ability to regulate for environmental protections and climate action.

A number of parties to the ECT have demanded reforms to exclude climate action and environmental protections from ISDS provisions of the agreement, and environmental defenders argue that the treaty [must be scrapped](#) in its entirety to ensure governments can fulfill commitments made at the COP26 and in the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

## 9. AFTINET in the news

- [Pfizer refuses to share vaccine knowledge as it announces \\$US36 billion in vaccine revenue](#), Michael West Media, November 30
- ['Exposes failure': Aid groups slam Morrison govt, WTO over key vaccine deal](#), The New Daily, November 29
- [Advocates mourn global 'vaccine apartheid' illuminated by another COVID variant](#), The Mandarin, November 30
- [Australia refuses to co-sponsor COVID-19 vaccine IP waiver](#), Innovation Australia, 4 November