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UPDATED MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia-UK free trade deal: advocates warn of hidden traps on pandemic vaccine monopolies and urge independent cost-benefit analysis

After 18 months of secretive negotiations, Trade Ministers from Australia and the UK today signed the Australia-UK FTA and released the text of the agreement. Fair trade advocates are demanding an independent assessment of costs and benefits before it is ratified, as recommended by the parliamentary committee that reviews trade agreements.

In August this year, the Government-majority **Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT)** recommended in its [Report 193](#) that the Government should commission “**independent modelling and analysis of a trade agreement, at both the macro and sectoral levels**” (Recommendation 5).

Dr. Patricia Ranald, Convener of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) said:

“As usual the text of 32 chapters and thousands of pages has only been released after signing. The public deserves an independent assessment the true social, environmental, health and economic costs and benefits of this agreement before it is ratified”

“The Government must listen to its own members on the JSCOT committee who have called for independent cost benefit analysis of all trade agreements, including the Australia-UK FTA. Given the urgency of the need for government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, we also call for assessments of the health impacts and environmental aspects of the agreement, as well as impacts on women and Indigenous communities”

“The 32 chapters are modelled closely on the [Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership](#). These include provisions on intellectual property monopolies on medicines, trade in services, digital trade and government procurement, which may have hidden costs. Key concerns include:

- Intellectual Property provisions which cast doubt on the Australian Government’s claimed support for a temporary waiver on WTO COVID-19 vaccine monopolies by emphasising support for specific current WTO TRIPs agreement provisions which the UK and the EU have used as their rationale for opposing the waiver (Chapter 15, Clause 15.6.2). There is also a [side letter](#) on medicines that says that Australia and the UK “will strengthen their cooperation on regulation of medicines.”
- Trade in services provision which could restrict government regulation of essential services, including aged care and energy regulation.
- Digital trade provisions which could reduce regulation of data held by Big Tech companies and weaken digital privacy protections for consumers.
- Weak environmental and labour rights protections that are not enforceable through government-to-government dispute mechanisms.

AFTINET will conduct a full analysis of the text of the Australia-UK free trade agreement and make public submissions to the upcoming JSCOT inquiry.

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