



Trade Justice Bulletin

January 2022

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1. Introduction

Dear Members,

As 2021 came to an end, trade justice was in the spotlight with two major stories in the headlines. The first was the announcement of a **UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement**, and the second was the coming into force of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** mega deal. In this bulletin, we’re bringing you our analysis of these deals, together with an update on the gridlock at the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** on negotiations to lift COVID19 vaccine patent monopolies.

Last year was a huge year for the campaign for trade justice, and 2022 will be no different. With a Federal Election just around the corner and further trade deals looming, we need your thoughts and ideas to help us make important campaigning decisions. As an AFTINET member (whether individual or organisational), you can [join us](#) in an annual **Campaigns Planning Meeting**. This is your chance to share your ideas and give feedback on our plans for the year.

As we kick off the year, now is a great time to [renew your membership](#), make a [donation](#), or [buy](#) a unique AFTINET 20th Anniversary cloth banner/T-Towel with Wilcox and Tandberg cartoons.

Thank you, and happy new year!

The AFTINET Team.

2. Join the 2022 Campaigns Planning Meeting!



📣 Calling all AFTINET members: we need your ideas and input! 📣

At the Campaigns Planning Meeting, AFTINET individual and organisational members will be coming together by Zoom to discuss ideas for trade justice campaigning this year.

If you have some ideas, suggestions, or feedback on our campaigns, this is your chance to share them with the AFTINET community.

We hope to see you there!

[Register your attendance](#)

3. UK-Australia trade deal must receive independent cost-benefit analysis

After 18 months of secretive negotiations, Trade Ministers from Australia and the UK have signed the **Australia-UK trade deal** and released the text of the agreement. We immediately demanded an independent assessment of costs and benefits before it is ratified, as is recommended by the parliamentary committee that reviews trade agreements.

AFTINET Convenor **Dr. Patricia Ranald** told the media that the Government must be more transparent about the impacts of the agreement, saying: “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”

Our 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.
- **Trade in services** provisions 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. [Read more](#)

4. RCEP in force from January 1, but fails on human rights

Following ratification by the Australian and other governments, the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** came into force on January 1, 2022.

Negotiations began in 2012 between sixteen countries, but India withdrew in 2019. Six ASEAN and five non-ASEAN governments have ratified. They are **Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Korea, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand** and **Vietnam**. Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines have not yet ratified the RCEP, but are expected to do so in 2022.

News about the RCEP's implementation only reported tariff reductions and common customs standards. However, the Government has acknowledged that the RCEP provides no additional market access for Australian exports because Australia already has free trade agreements with all RCEP members. There has been no independent assessment of the economic, environmental, health or gender impacts of the RCEP.

Although community campaigning excluded some of the worst proposals like investor rights to sue governments from the agreement, RCEP fails the human rights test. The RCEP has no commitments for governments to meet any human rights or labour standards, despite the military coup in **Myanmar**, and violations of these standards in countries like **China** and the **Philippines**. The RCEP could also restrict local industry development, increase the risk of exploitation of temporary migrant workers, restrict regulation of aged care services, and restrict State Government regulation of emissions from power stations.

Ahead of coming into force, civil society groups from across the ten ASEAN countries [asked the ASEAN secretariat](#) to conduct a **human rights assessment** of the agreement, arguing that the deal will accelerate the 'race to the bottom' competition among ASEAN states, encouraging countries to "offer the lowest production costs, utilizing cheap labour, tax relief, and access to natural resources. This agenda will sacrifice peoples' rights, especially labor rights, and would have a broad impact on people's lives, and on extraction of natural resources."

AFTINET called on Australian parliamentarians to **delay ratification and seek amendments** to the agreement to address these issues. We will monitor the implementation of the RCEP and seek changes at the review which is scheduled in two years.

[Read more](#)

5. Another year of delay: WTO fails lift patent monopolies on COVID19 vaccines

As **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** delegates met at the end of 2021 to discuss a proposal to temporarily lift vaccine intellectual property patents, a coalition of Australian vaccine equity advocates called for immediate action amid a 'tsunami' of Omicron cases.

Australian public health advocates, human rights campaigners, fair-trade organisations and trade unions are warned that the December 16 meeting would be the world's last chance in 2021 to remove monopoly barriers on life-saving vaccines other COVID-related products. The proposal, first put forward more than one year ago, has the support of more than 100 member states in the WTO, in addition to the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**.

Trade Minister **Dan Tehan** has previously confirmed Australia's support of the proposal (known as the '**TRIPS Waiver**') to allow countries such as South Africa and India to produce their own COVID19 vaccines and treatments. In a **joint letter** delivered to Mr. Tehan, AFTINET and our allied organisations called on the Minister to do more, urging him to join the 64 other countries which have co-sponsored the proposal.

Our Convenor, **Dr Patricia Ranald**, said: “Omicron is the direct result of global vaccine inequality, as new variants develop in areas of low vaccination. The WTO will lose its credibility as a global institution unless it puts saving lives first and waives monopolies on COVID vaccines and related products to enable increased production in developing countries.”

The WTO, however, failed to reach a decision in the December meeting, and in a subsequent meeting on January 10 the WTO Director General **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** called for urgent action towards a comprehensive WTO outcome on pandemic response. “More than two years have passed since the onset of the pandemic... We at the WTO now have to step up urgently to do our part to reach a multilateral outcome on intellectual property and other issues so as to fully contribute to the global efforts in the fight against COVID-19.”

Despite the continuing calls for a decision, negotiations at the WTO remain blocked by the **EU**, (led by **Germany**) the **UK** and **Switzerland**, which have large pharmaceutical industries.

[Read more](#)

6. ‘Open source’ vaccine shows how vaccines could be available to all

As Big Pharma continues to block efforts to lift intellectual property monopolies on COVID19 vaccines, a team of scientists in Texas have announced plans to deliver a ‘COVID vaccine for all’.

The vaccine, dubbed **CORBEVAX**, does not have any patents or strings attached to either the production company **BioE** or the researchers who developed the vaccine prototype at **Texas Children’s CVD** and **Baylor**.

Lead scientists behind the vaccine, **Maria Elena Bottazzi** and **Peter J. Hotez**, have described the vaccine as “the first COVID vaccine designed specifically for global health”, adding, “We believe that, with our low-cost yet highly effective, safe, and easy to store and distribute recombinant protein vaccine, we might finally achieve global vaccine equity and overcome vaccine hesitancy and refusal.”

Speaking to the Washington Post, Peter Hotez said: “We’re not trying to make money. We just want to see people get vaccinated.”

[Read about the ‘open source’ vaccine](#)

Meanwhile, a new report from **Oxfam International** has detailed the growing global economic inequality caused by the COVID19 pandemic. The report, *Inequality Kills*, highlights how **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** intellectual property rules have created a “vaccine apartheid” between wealthy nations and low-income countries, “a stain on the history of our species”.

The report states that “even though safe and effective vaccines are available, more than 80% have gone to G20 countries, while less than 1% have reached low-income countries.” This is a result of pharmaceutical monopolies which are “artificially restricting the supply and driving up prices, with companies such as Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna charging as much as 24 times the estimated cost of production for a dose of vaccine.”

“A number of rich-country governments are actively enabling this extreme vaccine inequality by blocking the efforts of low- and middle-income countries at the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** to waive intellectual property rules on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. This action would suspend the monopoly control of pharmaceutical corporations, temporarily removing the legal barriers that are playing a central role in preventing low- and middle income countries from producing billions of vaccines and treatments through qualified manufacturers.”

[Read more about the report](#)

7. AFTINET in the news

- [Rich Nations Are Withholding Vaccines From the Poorest, Explains AFTINET's Dr Patricia Ranald](#), Sydney Criminal Lawyers, December 7
- [Guardian News Live Blog](#), AFTINET Convenor Dr Patricia Ranald on the UK-Australia trade deal, The Guardian, December 17