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## **Network demands secret WTO talks be made public**

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"WTO negotiations on Trade in Services (GATS) taking place behind closed doors could threaten government rights to regulate and provide essential services like education, water and postal services," Dr Patricia Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, said today.

The Network campaign and publication **WTO Negotiations: The MAI Resurrected?** is being launched on Wednesday 24 April at NSW Parliament House at 12.30 pm.

"The WTO negotiations treat essential services purely as traded goods without recognising the need for them to be affordable and accessible to everyone", said Dr Ranald. "For example, last week a leaked secret European Union WTO document asked Australia to open postal services to competition by private foreign companies. This would mean an end to 45c standard letter charge, affordable for rural Australians, which is provided by Australia Post as a government service."

"The EU demand to open water services to private competitors would threaten most state government policies of public ownership and price regulation of water services. Other WTO proposals have put education services on the bargaining table," Dr Ranald added.

"There are also WTO proposals for other agreements which would restrict government policy. For example, an Investment Agreement would remove the right of government to regulate foreign investment, like Australia's 15% foreign ownership cap on Telstra shares. A Government Procurement agreement would remove the right of governments to use government contracts to develop local industries" said Dr Ranald.

"These proposals resurrect many of the negative features of the discredited draft Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which collapsed in 1998 after it was exposed by community debate" explained Dr Ranald.

"We demand that all these proposals and the government's responses to them be made public and subjected to full legislative debate. Australia should not sign away any rights to regulate investment in the public interest or to regulate and provide essential services," said Dr Ranald.

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