

## AFTINET Bulletin No. 43, 20 August, 2002

If you would like to contribute to the Bulletin, please contact Pat Ranald via email at [pranald@piac.asn.au](mailto:pranald@piac.asn.au). Our website is [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)

### Contents

1. Motion on GATS for local councils
  2. Canadian Christian activist Mary Boyd. Meetings and workshops in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane
- 

#### 1. Motion on GATS for local councils

AFTINET is circulating this motion to Local Councils for their consideration. Please consider raising it with your local councillor if you can.

#### Background to motion

The current negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) being conducted by the Australian Government and other governments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) could have serious repercussions for Australian local government.

GATS rules are binding on all levels of government but there has been little if any consultation with local government about the negotiations and their implications.

A recent study by the Canadian Environmental Law Association (found at [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)) identified areas of local government services and regulation which could be affected by the GATS negotiations. The services identified included:

- Water and sewerage services
- Waste management
- Road building
- Land use planning
- Library services.

Changes to GATS rules on regulation of services could mean that local councils could face complaints about their regulation through the WTO complaints system. Governments can complain about the laws or regulations of other governments to a panel of trade law experts. The winner can ask that laws or regulations be changed and can ban or tax the exports of the loser.

The GATS agreement signed by Australia and other governments in 1994 promotes international trade in services and seeks to remove barriers to such trade. Although some GATS rules apply to all services, many only apply to those services each government agrees to list in the agreement. GATS has some rules which recognise the right of governments to regulate services and to provide and fund public services. However, there are now proposals to change these rules.

Governments are being asked to increase the range of services included in the GATS agreement. Requests in the negotiations from the European Union, for example, include water services, which in rural areas are often local government services. There are also proposals in the negotiations to change GATS rules to reduce the right of governments to regulate by declaring that some regulation of services should be "least trade restrictive." There are also proposals to define funding of government services in GATS rules as "subsidies" to which transnational corporations should have access, resulting in privatisation.

## **Motion**

That Council:

1. believes public policy regarding the regulation, funding and provision of essential services should be made democratically by governments at the national, state and local level;
2. calls on the Federal Government to fully consult with state and local government about the implications of the GATS negotiations for local government services and regulation;
3. calls on the Federal Government to make public the specific requests it made to other governments in the GATS negotiations which were due on 30 June 2002;
4. calls on the Federal Government to make public its specific responses to requests from other governments which are due on 30 March 2003;
5. calls on the Federal Government to support the clear exclusion of public services from the GATS, including local government community services and water services;
6. calls on the Federal Government to oppose any proposals which would open up the funding of such public services to privatisation;
7. calls on the Federal Government to oppose any proposals which would reduce the right of local government to regulate services, including the application of a "least trade restrictive" test to regulation;
8. writes to the Minister for Trade concerning the above; and
9. submits the above motions for adoption by the Local Government Association of New South Wales at its 2002 Annual Conference with an additional motion that they be submitted for adoption by the Australian Local Government Association at its 2002 Annual Conference.

## **2. Mary Boyd meetings and workshops in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane**

Mary Boyd is a Canadian Christian activist who has worked with communities in responding to the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement. She is holding meetings and workshops to share her experiences, and explore the following issues:

- How much of Australia's natural and human resources are we willing to surrender to the self-interest of global corporations?
- Why is it urgent that we all know what WTO, GATS and TRIPS mean and what impacts they could have on Australian culture and society, if they are not challenged?
- How are international trade negotiations implicated in the displacement of peoples, violence and war, poverty and disease and the destroying of the ecology of the Earth?

### **MELBOURNE**

Sunday, 25th August, 10.30 - 4 pm, Kilbride Centre, Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park.  
Contact Joan Ryan Tel: (03) 9850-2166. Email: joan\_ryan@bigpond.com

### **SYDNEY**

a) Thursday 29 August, 5.15 - 7.15 pm at PIAC, Level 1, 46-48 York St, Sydney 2000  
b) Sat 31 August, 10.30 a.m. - 3.30 p.m, The Grail Centre, 22 McHatton St, North Sydney  
Contact Alison Healey. Tel: (02) 9955-3053. Email: grailsydney@ozemail.com.au

### **BRISBANE**

Saturday, 7 September, 1 - 5 p.m, St Mary's Church, Merivale Street, South Brisbane  
Contact Jill Herbert. Tel: (07) 3351-5390. Email: vidlerpatandjill@aol.com