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Good News on GATS

In an unprecedented move to link local and global regulation, Marrickville, Waverly and Leichhardt Councils and the NSW Local Government Association Conference recently passed resolutions asking for the Federal Government to consult about the implications for local government of the WTO negotiations on Trade in Services (GATS). Similar resolutions have been passed by the Melbourne City Council and by the Moreland Council in Victoria. The resolution is also being submitted to the National Local Government Association Conference.

A recent study by the Canadian Environmental Law Association (found at 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, zoning regulations, library services and community services like childcare.

The resolutions passed by local Councils and the NSW Local Government Association Conference stressed that public policy regarding the regulation, funding and provision of essential services should be made democratically by governments at the national, state and local level, and that such services should not be included in trade agreements. They called for full transparency and consultation on GATS with state and local government. See www.aftinet.org.au for a copy of the resolution.

New ALP Policy on GATS

The ALP shadow Minister Craig Emerson this week released a new policy on GATS which contains some of the points raised by AFTINET.

While confirming its in principle support for liberalisation of trade in services, the paper says that Labour will not support governmental services which are provided on a non-competitive and non-commercial basis being included in the GATS.

It also opposes any undermining of access to essential services or restriction on the right to operate universal service obligations deemed necessary on social, regional and other policy grounds. It opposes any proposals to undermine the public provision of health and education services. It will not support any offers under GATS that would require the privatisation of public assets. The ALP would also oppose any restriction on the right of governments to regulate and to introduce new regulations on the supply of services.

Finally the ALP supports community involvement in Australia's position on the GATS negotiations, and insists that the Australian Governments' requests and offers in the present GAT negotiations be made public, allowing ample time for consultation and debate. Further information from CraigEmerson.mp@aph.gov.au

This means that there is some common ground on GATS between all opposition parties, thanks in part to the work done by AFTINET.