

*Scope of Intellectual Property Patents:
Recent Developments in the US and Australia
Indicate that a Fundamental Reassessment of the
Governance of IPRs May be Underway?*

A Public Lecture presented by Adjunct Professor Anna George,
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The contentious north/south debate on patent rights and access to medicines interrupted and altered the framework of international collaboration related to public health and food security and disrupted trade negotiations. Political debate has occurred primarily within the confines of multilateral diplomacy but now the legitimacy of patenting of gene sequences is being fundamentally questioned at the national level, by the country most supportive of enforcing intellectual property rights – the United States. The Australian Senate has also been at the forefront of this debate - criticising the practice of patenting gene sequences and a Bill is before the Senate to clarify the scope of patents rights.

These developments represent the first attempt to scrutinise the scope of patent rights from both an economic and public policy perspective. It is therefore important to question why IPRs are so little understood in the broader economic and policy community? Why are key representatives of the scientific community (Academy of Science, CSIRO, G8) so opposed to this Bill? Why are Departments of Health and Industry at loggerheads? And, why are academics not at the forefront of this debate? Is this a case of regulatory capture underpinned by the too big to fail argument or a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the patent system?

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Senate Room

All Welcome, Free Admission

Anna George is an Adjunct Professor at Murdoch and an Associate Fellow with the Centre on Global Health Security, Chatham House, London. She spent almost twenty years working in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a multilateral negotiator representing Australia at the United Nations (CSW, CSD UNRWA and UNIDO); the WTO (TRIPS Council); non-proliferation and disarmament forums (OPCW which implements the Chemical Weapons Convention, CBW Australia Group and Middle East Arms Control and Regional Security); and, Australia's Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia from 2003-06. She continues to work on foreign and trade policy issues related to access to medicines, biosecurity and intellectual property, particularly the governance aspects of IPRs.