

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Public Hearing – 29 April 2021
Question on Notice from Senator Siewert to Austrade

Question

(Proof Hansard, page 20)

Engagement with foreign investors about investing in an Australian capacity to manufacture and develop mRNA vaccines or transfer of intellectual property

Senator SIEWERT: ... Can I ask what role either the department or Austrade has in terms of negotiating intellectual property and the TRIPS waiver issues internationally for vaccines.

Ms Dacey: We're all shaking our heads. I don't think any of us can help you, I'm afraid.

Senator SIEWERT: So Austrade doesn't have any role in this issue?

Ms Ralston: No, we don't. I suspect maybe the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as well as our IP Australia and other colleagues have, but certainly not Austrade, in a negotiation sense.

Senator SIEWERT: You've had no engagement with any questions being asked of the agency?

Ms Ralston: Not that I'm aware of. I'll make inquiries, but nothing that we're aware of ...

Senator SIEWERT: Have you had any role in looking at investments in the manufacturing and development of capacity of mRNA vaccines, in terms of an Australian manufacturer? ...

Ms Ralston: From an Austrade point of view, I don't have any information with me today so we'll have to take that on notice. I'm not aware of any conversation about investment in an Australian capacity. We talk to foreign investors on a range of activities and a range of industry sectors but nothing that's striking me that would relate to your question here.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could take it on notice, that would be appreciated. So you haven't been talking to foreign investors about investing in an Australian capacity or transfer of intellectual property?

Ms Ralston: I couldn't say clearly. It's not in the evidence we've brought for this particular conversation. We were expecting it to be focusing more on the tourism and infrastructure related issues. We'll make some inquiries of our colleagues. I couldn't possibly say what we've—I'll see what we can get to you quickly.

Answer

There is no record of Austrade being involved in discussions with global investors about mRNA manufacturing capabilities related to COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing or transfer of intellectual property.