



Australian Citizens Party

Craig Isherwood, National Secretary

PO Box 376, COBURG, VIC 3058

Phone: 1800 636 432 **Email:** info@citizensparty.org.au **Web:** citizensparty.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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No, Australia is not losing ‘sovereignty’ to the WHO and China next week

The hysterical claim that Australia is set to lose its sovereignty to a World Health Organisation “treaty” the day after the federal election is false.

The United Australia Party started running advertisements on 17 May—just four days out from the election—claiming that the day after the election, the Labor and Liberal parties planned to give China control of “the health of Australians”.

UAP’s 17 May press release asserted:

“Handing control of our nation’s health programs to the pro-China World Health Organisation (WHO) should raise alarm bells for all Australian citizens, says UAP Chair Clive Palmer.”

Palmer went on to claim: “It is a shocking development to learn that the WHO will gain jurisdiction over controlling Australia’s health programs a day after the Federal Election. It is well known that China is a major contributor to and has a high degree of influence over the World Health Organisation. The WHO has been rightly criticised for pro-China bias in the past. It should be concerning to all Australians who value freedom and democracy that our health policies could fall under the influence of communist China.”

And, in a shameless dog-whistle to Sinophobes, in an 18 May email to members, the UAP highlighted that Australia’s representative to the WHO meeting is a professor with a Chinese name. Following this email, memes are circulating on the internet claiming the Australian professor is a “Chinese communist”.

Twisted lies

None of Palmer’s claims are true; in fact, he is completely twisting the truth to blame China for something that is in fact an attack on China.

Here is what is actually happening starting the day after Australia’s federal election:

From 22-28 May, the 75th World Health Assembly (WHA) will convene in Geneva, Switzerland. The WHA is essentially all of the member nations of the United Nations, meeting to discuss internationally relevant health issues. The WHA sets the rules, agreed to by all member nations, which govern the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN agency that coordinates global health information, cooperation, and emergency actions.

Aside from the usual issues the WHA discusses, this upcoming WHA will also discuss two extra agenda items:

1. Amendments to the WHO’s [“International Health Regulations”](#) (IHRs) proposed by the US Biden Administration, which it claims are to “strengthen the ability of the WHO and member states to prevent, detect, and respond to future public health emergencies of international concern”;
2. A proposal “for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response”, i.e. a global pandemic “treaty”.

In the blizzard of claims blowing around the internet, the two topics above are being confused with each other.

To deal with the treaty first: it is only a proposal. Nothing will be finalised at the WHA that starts the day after the Australian election. The most that will happen is the WHA will continue its preliminary discussions on a treaty, which is at minimum a two-year process. It will be at least 2024 before the finalised wording of a treaty, or convention, or agreement is available for the member nations to vote on at the WHA. And as London’s *Telegraph* reported on 12 April 2022: “But there are fears that the outcome—which is not due to be presented to the WHA until 2024—could emerge from years of fraught negotiations *without any teeth* amid significant geopolitical tensions [meaning with China and Russia-Ed.], especially as COVID-19 slips down the priority list.” (Emphasis added.)

So, no treaty will be decided next week in Geneva.

What will be voted on next week is the [Biden Administration's amendments to the IHRs](#). Clive Palmer has it twisted around, because these amendments are not a plot by China to take over our health, *they are an attack on China!*

The US amendments are based on the narrative started by the Trump administration in 2020, echoed by Clive Palmer, that China “mishandled” and “hid” the outbreak of COVID, allowing the spread that led to the global pandemic; and that the WHO was complicit, because China “controls” it. This isn't actually true, but with the sharp deterioration in relations with China in the last two years, this narrative has stuck politically in the USA and countries like Australia. Ironically, anyone who supported the attacks on China over its handling of COVID, such as Scott Morrison's 2020 call to send in inspectors to investigate, *should support these US amendments because they are targeted at China!*

The amendments seek to make the WHO less diplomatically sensitive in the way it relates to countries affected by a disease outbreak. Currently, the WHO is very sensitive to member nations' sovereignty, and it treads carefully to avoid insulting a nation—such as by accusing a nation of causing a global pandemic—not least so it can ensure its experts have access to assess an outbreak. Because the China-haters in the Trump administration were accusing China of deliberately spreading COVID, they cynically twisted the WHO's diplomatic sensitivity towards China into propaganda that “China controls the WHO”. Unfortunately, Biden has continued much of the Trump administration's narrative, so the US amendments specifically propose to empower the WHO to unilaterally declare an “actual or potential” public health emergency, without the agreement of the country in which the outbreak has occurred.

Essentially, the US amendments are intended to give the WHO the power to embarrass nations. This does somewhat impinge on nations' sovereignty compared to how the WHO operates now, but that's it, however. Once the WHO declares a public health emergency, it can advise, but it cannot dictate how nations respond. It cannot order lockdowns, or forced vaccinations, as some people are claiming (in fact, [the WHO is far more cautious about vaccine mandates](#) than what we have seen from Australia's state governments). And all member nations are able to reject the amendments and opt out of the International Health Regulations.

China is expected to oppose these amendments next week, likely seeing them as a threat to its sovereignty, [according to Health Policy Watch on 6 May](#). This is an irony for the UAP—they are actually on China's side!