

## ACTION ALERT AA15-1: TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Friends may be aware that negotiations for a Trans-Pacific Partnership are proceeding largely in secret among the twelve nations involved, and this Alert is to give Friends basic details upon which representations can be made to the Minister for Trade, Andrew Robb MP and other Parliamentarians.

### What is TPP?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) is a free trade agreement that encompasses the following countries – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the USA and Vietnam. According to an official statement issued in 2011, the aim is to “enhance trade and investment among the TPP partner countries, to promote innovation, economic growth and development, and to support the creation and retention of jobs”. It covers many areas including agriculture, intellectual property, telecommunications, environment, investment, labour, finance, and pharmaceuticals. Other countries are likely to join the agreement in due course. The latest negotiations have just concluded in New York, and the participants are working for an agreement early in 2015.

According to the website of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the TPP addresses issues that promote:

- Comprehensive market access by eliminating tariffs and other barriers to goods and services trade and investment.
- A fully regional agreement by facilitating the development of production and supply chains among TPP members.
- Cross-cutting trade issues by building on work being done in APEC and other fora by incorporating four new cross-cutting issues in the TPP. These issues are:
  1. Regulatory coherence: Commitments will promote trade between the countries by making trade among them more seamless and efficient.
  2. Competitiveness and business facilitation: Commitments will enhance the domestic and regional competitiveness of each member country's economy and promote economic integration and jobs in the region.
  3. Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Commitments will address concerns about the difficulty in understanding and using trade agreements, encouraging these sized enterprises to trade internationally.
  4. Development: Comprehensive and robust market liberalization, improvements in trade and investment enhancing disciplines, and other commitments will serve to strengthen institutions important for economic development and governance.
- New trade challenges by promoting trade and investment in innovative products and services, including the digital economy and green technologies, and to ensure a

competitive business environment across the TPP region.

- Living agreement by enabling the updating of the agreement when needed to address trade issues that materialize in the future as well as new issues that arise with the expansion of the agreement to include new countries.<sup>[80]</sup>

The Australian Government sees the TPP as part of its commitment to extend trade in the region. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website lists a number of interests and benefits of TPP:

- Stronger economic links between economies in the Asia-Pacific region based on common rules for trading.
- New opportunities for Australian goods to be used in manufacturing and production processes in the region.
- Greater access to markets by Australian exporters.
- Enhanced access to the region by suppliers of education, legal, financial, mining and agricultural services.
- Better outcomes for consumers and business via e-commerce.

### **Other Perspectives**

The group most closely associated with concern about the TPP is AFTINET – the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network. Its website [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au) identifies the following areas of major concern about the negotiations:

- Foreign companies could sue our governments over health and environment laws.
- Big costs to our health through higher medicine prices.
- Impacts on workers' rights and the environment.
- Internet freedom under threat.
- Threats to sustainable, healthy food.
- Australian content in media could be reduced.

Choice magazine ([www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au)) is campaigning for the release of the draft agreement prior to any approval by the Government. Public protests have taken place in Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Japan. In addition, many commentators have questioned whether the TPP is really a way for large corporations to undermine accepted standards in many fields in order to enhance their profits. Other groups campaigning about TPP are Get Up [www.getup.org.au](http://www.getup.org.au) - and The Sum of Us [www.sumofus.org](http://www.sumofus.org)

### **Quakers**

In March 2014 QPLC put a submission to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade on the TPP, especially the investment aspects. The submission was supportive of the Greens' proposed Bill to safeguard Australia from some of the deleterious impacts of such agreements. Here is an excerpt:

The focus of this submission is the negotiations on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in which Australia has been involved in recent years. In particular, we believe the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions are likely to have a negative effect on central Australian values. For this reason we support the proposed Trade and Investment

(Protecting the Public Interest) Bill put forward by Senator Whish-Wilson. The purpose of this Bill is “to prevent the Commonwealth from entering into an agreement with one or more foreign countries that includes investor-state dispute settlement provisions”.

Despite many submissions of a similar kind, the Senate Committee came down against the Bill, mainly (it seems) because it was seen to be too constraining on government capacity to negotiate agreements.

## **Action**

Apart from the Minister for Trade, Andrew Robb AO MP, others who might be contacted are members of the Senate committee (see below – email addresses for senators are Senator.Surname@aph.gov.au). Points that can be made are:

- The secrecy with which the negotiations are being conducted.
- The absence of opportunities for effective input from Australians.
- The need to have the draft TPP released for public comment prior to being signed.
- The risks to various progressive policies in Australia to protect standards in health, environment, pharmaceuticals, and intellectual property.
- The dangers of assuming that free trade agreements are always the best way to advance the interests of people in the countries involved.
- The potential for TPP to tip the balance in favour of large corporations and against workers, farmers, environmentalists, artists, and others.

## **Parliamentarians to Lobby**

Andrew Robb MP, Minister for Trade (Andrew.Robb.MP@aph.gov.au)  
 Senator Penny Wong, Shadow Minister for Trade (Senator.Wong@aph.gov.au)  
 Senator Chris Back (chair of Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade Committee)  
 Senator Alex Gallacher (deputy chair)  
 Senator David Fawcett (SA)  
 Senator Scott Ludlam (WA)  
 Senator Anne McEwen (SA)  
 Senator James McGrath (Qld)  
 Senator Peter Whish-Wilson (Tas)

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee  
 Canberra, February 2015