



An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

Australia Confirms October 25–27 TPP Ministerial Meeting

Trade Ministers from the 12 Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) countries (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam) will meet again in Sydney, Australia from October 25–27 to move the negotiations forward, with the goal of achieving a breakthrough by the time of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

The three-day ministerial meeting hosted by Australian Trade and Investment Minister, Andrew Robb, will focus on achieving progress on key outstanding issues such as agricultural market access, intellectual property and state-owned enterprises with “an eye to concluding the basic elements of the agreement before the end of the year.” Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) confirmed on October 2nd.

“After more than four years of intense negotiations, the conclusion of the world’s largest regional trade agreement is within reach,” Australian Trade and Investment Minister, Andrew Robb, said.

Prior to Sydney, TPP chief negotiators and technical experts will gather in Canberra from October 19–24 to prepare for the ministerial gathering. Although observers expressed doubts about whether a breakthrough could be achieved by the end of October, sources close to the negotiations said the U.S. is pushing to have something concrete achieved by the end of the October / early November in order to provide President Barack Obama with something concrete to announce on the sidelines of the APEC summit.

But the talks’ success continue to hinge on a breakthrough in the parallel discussion between Japan and the U.S. Officials from the two major TPP countries, who were not expected to meet before the Australian meeting, have resumed their bilateral discussion on autos and agriculture last week and are set to continue the week of October 13th. In effect, the office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) announced that Acting Deputy USTR, Wendy Cutler and Chief Agricultural Negotiator, Darci Vetter have traveled to Tokyo to continue negotiations with their Japanese counterparts despite earlier claims that there would

be no more bilateral talks between the two countries before the Australian meetings.

At an Oct 9th USTR debrief with industry advisors, one source who attended the meeting said there is a general impression of a strong push, though the USTR also stressed the usual caveats that no deadlines have been set as substance will continue to drive the talks.

In addition, the source said TPP chief negotiators are now talking about planning to continue their meetings after the October 25-27 ministerial gathering based on ministers’ guidelines, who in turn may take up talks on November 7 when they arrive in Beijing for the APEC summit.

Other observers meanwhile stated that the briefing revealed the existence of large gaps in many TPP chapters, but acknowledged that the USTR is nevertheless doing its best to convince advisers and other TPP observers that they are determined to reach some sort of deal by the APEC summit.

A TF/FOOD SECURITY SOLUTION IN THE MAKING?

While awaiting a resolution on India and U.S. divergences on trade facilitation (TF) and food security, members of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific group of states (ACP) called on developed countries to resume the Doha negotiations by starting the work on the post-Bali work programme.

The group composed of developing countries is often identified as the biggest losers of the current stalemate as none of its members are involved in today’s dynamic trade negotiations – such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – taking place outside the WTO. The group said the onus falls on “major partners take the leadership to conclude the DDA, with development at the core of any deal.”

So far the stalemate on TF and food security has frozen work in all areas of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) which is set to remain on hold until a resolution is found on the issue. U.S. President Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have called for continued work at the WTO

following their bilateral meeting on September 30, but it looks like the onus falls on India to make the first move.

The WTO dispute settlement panel has ruled in favor of the U.S. which has challenged India's ban on various U.S. agricultural products – such as poultry meat, eggs, and live pigs – allegedly to protect against avian influenza.

The U.S. Trade Representative, Michael Froman, announced on October 14th that the U.S. has won a major victory at the WTO on behalf of its farmers. The panel agreed with the U.S. that India's ban breached numerous international trade rules, including because it was imposed without sufficient scientific evidence.

“This is a major victory for American farmers. The WTO panel agreed with the U.S. case that India lacks any scientific basis to restrict U.S. agricultural products, including U.S. poultry products. Our farmers produce the finest – and safest – agricultural products in the world,” said Froman.

“I am pleased that the WTO Panel determined that India's ban on poultry is inconsistent with its commitments under the WTO SPS [*sanitary and phytosanitary*] Agreement. The USDA will work in close partnership with USTR to ensure that U.S. poultry producers and processors have access to this important market,” added Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack.

How this panel decision will ultimately influence India's decision on TF/food security remains to be seen. WTO Members, meanwhile, have given themselves until October 16th to find a solution on the current stalemate when they gather in an informal Trade Negotiating Committee meeting. However, sources now cite the October 21st General Council meeting as the likely deadline to resolve the TFA/food security issue.

KEY UPCOMING EVENTS

- WTO Informal TNC, October 16
- TPP Chief Negotiator Meeting, 19-24 October, Canberra (Australia - TBC)
- TPP Ministerial Meeting, October 25–27, Sydney (Australia)
- WTO General Council, October 21, December 10–12
- APEC Leaders' Summit, November 10-11 Beijing (China)
- WTO Regular Agriculture Committee, November 13-14
- G-20 Leaders Summit, November 15-16, Brisbane (Australia)

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada and Canadian Hatching Egg Producers to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, particularly on the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

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