



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

WTO Members to Appoint New Committee Chairs

World Trade Organization (WTO) Members are being consulted for the appointment of several new negotiating body chairs. The process, which started the week of February 5th, is expected to end on March 7th or 8th with a General Council meeting to formally appoint the nominees by consensus.

Several committees and negotiating bodies of importance are up for grabs; the first being the chairmanship of the agriculture special session as the current chair, Ambassador Stephen Karau from Kenya, is about to leave his post to return to Kenya. Informed sources said New Zealand's Ambassador, David Walker, a former chair of the agriculture negotiating group, has shown interest in chairing the group once more.

DSB and Fisheries

The other key positions are with the dispute settlement body (DSB) and the negotiating group on rules chairs. The next DSB chair will have to lead the committee during a period of an increased number of trade disputes and a blockage in the functioning of the Appellate Body (AB) as the U.S. continues to block the appointment of new judges.

The Trump administration has questioned the WTO's dispute settlement system to the point that it has even opposed Rules 15 of the working procedures for appellate review which allows Appellate Body judges to continue working on cases they were assigned to before their terms ended, one WTO official said. The AB, which is normally composed of seven Members, is currently down to just four, with another whose term is due to expire this September.

“So clearly the stakes are high,” said the Director of the WTO's Legal Affairs Division, John Adank. “The question that I think a number [of Members] are asking is: What does the U.S. actually want to do?” he asked.

The next DSB chair will by tradition become the next person to chair the General Council – the organization's highest decision body – in 2019 and therefore be responsible for the organization of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12). So far, countries that have shown interest for the DSB position are Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand, sources said.

The other high profile ambassador set to leave is Wayne McCook, Jamaica's Permanent Representative to the WTO and chair of the negotiating group on rules, who last week chaired his last meeting on fisheries subsidies.

His replacement will lead the talks on the fisheries subsidies with the goal of completing a comprehensive agreement that covers all aspects of the Sustainable Development Goal 14.6, including an agreement on the so-called illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Delhi Mini-Ministerial

As surprising as it may sound, India is taking the lead in trying to resume the talks on what it described as “the most relevant WTO issues”. As such, India has invited more than 40 trade ministers – including all key players – to attend a mini-ministerial brainstorming meeting in Delhi on March 19-20.

The goal of the gathering will be to arrive at a clearer picture on what issues should be considered priorities for Members' work and how to move the negotiations forward leading up the MC12 in 2019.

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.

For more information or comments, please visit: dairyfarmers.ca, chickenfarmers.ca, eggfarmers.ca, turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca, chep-poic.ca

Legal Deposit: National Library of Canada, ISSN 1496-9254

