

Trans-Pacific Trade Agreement Should Protect Forests, Fish, U.S. Says

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By: Mark Drajem

The U.S. is pushing Pacific nations to accept curbs on fishing subsidies and on wood from trees felled illegally, according to a proposal being released today.

As part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership under negotiations by nine nations, the U.S. wants new restrictions on commerce that may harm the environment.

The negotiating proposals “are trailblazing in a number of ways,” Demetrios Marantis, the deputy U.S. Trade Representative, said in an interview Dec. 2. The trade office is releasing today its so-called green paper outlining publicly for the first time demands it has made in the talks.

The planned accord among the Pacific Rim nations is the first trade deal that President Barack Obama’s administration is negotiating on its own, rather than inheriting from President George W. Bush.

The current talks are with Australia, Chile, Peru and Singapore, all of which already have separate free-trade agreements with the U.S., as well as with Malaysia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Brunei. Two-way trade between the U.S. and those eight nations totaled \$171 billion last year.

Canada, Mexico and Japan have expressed interest in joining the accord. If they do, it would be the largest free-trade deal ever for the U.S.

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk has said the trade pact must deal with what he has termed 21st century issues, such as rules for state-owned enterprises and protections for the environment.

Rhino Horns, Tiger Cubs

The U.S. wants the other nations in the accord to agree to bar the import and sale of illegally logged wood and wood products, as well as prohibitions on the sale of protected species such as rhino horns, live tiger cubs, tortoises and iguanas, according to the green paper.

Marantis said the other nations’ rules should be modeled after the Lacey Act, which sparked controversy in the U.S. after federal agents raided the factory of Gibson Guitar Corp. in Nashville, Tennessee. The U.S. said Gibson was using wood illegally cut in India for its guitars.

In addition, the U.S. is pushing for “disciplines” on fishing subsidies, which environmental groups such as Washington-based Oceana say is crucial to reduce the depletion of fish stocks by commercial catches. The paper doesn’t specify how those subsidies would be restricted.

In the past, the U.S. has resisted calls that it negotiate curbs on its agricultural subsidies as part of free-trade agreements. Marantis said the Obama administration isn’t worried that other nations may seize on the fishing proposal to argue that the Trans-Pacific Partnership should include limits on U.S. aid to farmers.

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