

Trans Pacific Partnership(TPP) Secretive Trade Pact

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Read about Sierra Club Trade Representative, Ilana Solomon's update on the secretive negotiations of the TPP currently being held in the tiny Southeast Asian island of Brunei.

PACIFIC RIM TRADE TALKS MAY BECOME EVEN MORE SECRETIVE

Brunei is a tiny, remote country in Southeast Asia with a population smaller than that of Washington, D.C. It's also the location of the current round of trade talks between the United States and eleven other Pacific Rim nations.

Who could think of a better place to hold a round of secretive trade talks? And the timing is opportune, too. Held at the end of August, when many - at least in the United States - are away on summer vacation, these trade talks will remain lurking in the shadows, capturing little media or public attention.

Between August 23 and 30, trade negotiators from these 12 nations will meet behind closed doors in Brunei to further hash out the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact. Governments are saying that it might be the last official round of these trade talks -- which seems both unacceptable and impossible. It's unacceptable because not a single word of draft text has been released to the public, despite the fact that the agreement has been under negotiation for more than three years and would affect the lives of millions of Americans and others across the globe. It's impossible since there are still numerous critical issues in the pact that remain unresolved going into this "final" round of talks. And, in the context of outspoken citizen opposition, Malaysia has become the first country to say that it will not agree to any timeline for signing the pact.

Some of the most contentious unresolved issues are in the pact's chapter on the environment -- one of many

controversial chapters. Here, the United States is pushing a strong conservation proposal that includes specific measures to promote responsible fisheries management, including policies to curb shark-finning, and a ban on trade in illegally harvested timber and illegally taken wildlife and wildlife parts. The U.S. proposal is legally binding and would commit countries not only to enforce domestic environmental laws, but also to enforce commitments made in international environmental agreements.

Unfortunately, however, other countries have thus far been unwilling to accept the strong U.S. proposal, so U.S. negotiators might be bullied into backing down at this round of trade talks. A number of North American environmental organizations have already weighed in, calling on U.S. Trade Representative Mike Froman to oppose efforts to weaken environmental protections. In Brunei, the U.S. must hold its ground and not put critical environmental objectives - like shark fins - on the chopping block.

In addition to the uncertain environment chapter, the Sierra Club is deeply concerned about a number of parts of the trade pact that seem to be closer to completion. In the pact are rules championed by the United States that give corporations virtually unfettered rights. These rules would allow corporations to sue governments over laws and policies that might reduce their profits. Surprisingly, these egregious rules have been less controversial and are further along in negotiations than the environment chapter. Similar rules in other trade pacts have resulted in assaults on policies such as a time-out on fracking in Quebec or a commitment to phase out nuclear energy in Germany. Of course, without full access to the texts, the public has not been able to even have a meaningful conversation about what these rules would mean for fighting climate disruption and protecting communities across the globe.

Given this context, the idea that the 19th round of trade talks in Brunei might be the last official round is particularly unacceptable. It seems very clear that negotiations aren't going to end after Brunei. What might happen, however, is that negotiations go even further underground, hidden deeper from the public. That means that now is the most important time to spread the word about this trade pact and demand transparency in these talks that will affect our food, water, air, jobs, and more.

--Ilana Solomon, Sierra Club Trade Representative. Follow Ilana on Twitter [here](#).