

## **Australian Negotiator Raises Doubts About Year-End Conclusion Of TPP a TPP Round Wraps Up, May Round To Be Held In U.S. . . .**

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MELBOURNE — At the closing press conference of the eleventh round of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

negotiations here, the lead Australian negotiator said that TPP members are working to wrap up the talks by the end of the year, but signaled it remains to be seen whether they will be able to do so. When asked if he was confident that the talks would wrap up this year, Hamish McCormick, first assistant secretary in the Office of Trade Negotiations, said he was confident that the talks “are making very good progress and that we are on track to bring it to a close as soon as we possibly can.” McCormick said that TPP members are striving to complete the talks this year, but held out the possibility that it could take longer. “I think we’ll just have to wait and see,” he said. “We are looking to conclude this year, but we want a high-quality agreement.”

He pointed out that TPP members as a group “haven’t said explicitly that we want to set a specific deadline” for finishing a deal. He said that TPP leaders last November urged their negotiators to conclude the talks as quickly as possible, and that this should be the focus of their efforts in 2012. McCormick appeared to be referring to the joint TPP leaders statement, which does not set any specific deadline for concluding TPP. However, President Obama last November publicly stated that TPP leaders have “directed our teams to finalize this agreement in the coming year”

Overall, the chief negotiators were hesitant to provide many details on the Melbourne round of talks, which for the first time discussed in detail the U.S. proposals on new disciplines for state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in a formal round.

They also had the first detailed discussions on the U.S. proposal on patent protections.

David Walker, New Zealand’s chief negotiator, responded to a question about progress made this week with respect to SOEs by describing the work as preliminary and as a chance to primarily ask questions, rather than a negotiation on the details of the U.S. proposal in this area.

In a March 8 announcement on the TPP talks, USTR said “productive exchanges” took place on issues such as SOE disciplines.

McCormick said that “notable progress” was made across the full range of chapters, including on “traditional” trade issues as well as new issues like regulatory coherence, supply chains and issues meant to promote development.

His statement almost mirrored that of USTR, which also talked about “notable progress” on traditional trade issues as well as on cross-cutting issues, such as regulatory coherence.

He also said negotiators discussed market access packages, including improved offers on services and government procurement presented by several parties. According to USTR, negotiators also worked on tariff packages for industrial goods, agricultural products and textiles.

Negotiators also discussed the U.S. labor proposal and agreed to consolidate all labor proposals tabled so far into one document that will form the basis for negotiation, a U.S. trade official said earlier this week.

When asked about the U.S. proposal on labor rights, Tran Quoc Khanh, Vietnam’s chief negotiator, said his country was of the view that labor standards “should not be used as a disguised barrier to trade in TPP.” At the same time, he said Vietnam stands ready to discuss “any proposal on the table” that would help to improve the conditions of workers in Vietnam.

Overall, McCormick said this Melbourne round of talks featured roughly 500 negotiators from the nine TPP members.

It also involved 250 registered stakeholders, who had the chance on March 4 to present their views to negotiators and to members of the press in roughly 40 different presentations, McCormick said.