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US fast track Bill for Trans-Pacific Trade deal (TPP) faces stiff opposition in Congress

The fast-track (Trade Priorities Act) [Bill was tabled in the US Congress](#) today but immediately faced [a storm of opposition from Democrats](#) as well as Republicans.

The 107-page Bill aims to persuade the Congress to give up its constitutional power to amend the text of any trade agreement, and sets objectives for US trade policy. If it is passed, Congress could only vote yes or no without amending the text of trade agreements.

The Bill would apply to all trade agreements, not only the TPP. But the timing of the Bill is aimed at reassuring other TPP governments about the capacity of the Obama administration to deliver on commitments made in negotiations, which are continuing this year after missing the US-imposed deadline of December 2013.

“The Australian Government would be extremely foolish to rely on such reassurances”, Dr Patricia Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network said today.

“The introduction of the Bill does not mean it will be passed, and in fact this is very unlikely. Congress has not agreed to fast-track since it lapsed in 2007. [In November last year, 151 Democrats](#) vowed not to support fast track. Leading Democrats today issued a [statement](#) confirming their opposition. The Tea Party Republicans are for different reasons vehemently opposed to reducing Congressional rights to change the text of trade agreements,” said Dr Ranald.

“In fact, despite the claims that the bill is bipartisan, the White House was not able to get Sandy Levin, the relevant senior Democrat Committee member in the House of Representatives, to sponsor it. [Congressman Levin has issued his own statement opposing the Bill.](#)”

“The Bill in fact reveals more detail of hardline US trade policies based on US industry interests and show that the TPP would erode the democratic right of other governments to make domestic laws and policies in the public interest. This shows that the TPP is not in Australia’s national interest,” said Dr Ranald.

“The TPP negotiations have missed numerous deadlines mainly because other governments have so far resisted US extreme proposals. These include foreign investor rights to sue governments over domestic legislation, stronger patents on medicines, which would mean higher medicine prices, criminalisation of Copyright breaches on the Internet, less local content in government procurement and audio-visual media, and weakening of food labelling requirements. The US is insisting on concessions from others in these areas before it makes any offers to open US markets, and has said it will not offer any additional market access to countries like Australia with which it already has a free trade agreement”, added Dr Ranald.

“The fast-track Bill confirms these extreme US proposals. We call on the Australian Government not to trade away Australia’s democratic rights to legislate in the public interest in the vain hope of increased market access. The only way to ensure that this does not happen is for the Government to release the text of the agreement for public and Parliamentary scrutiny before it is signed by Cabinet,” said Dr Ranald.

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