

Thursday 30 November, 2017

Half-cocked PACER-Plus Agreement fails working people

The PACER-Plus free trade agreement has been tabled in the senate today, despite the fact that Fiji and Papua New Guinea are opting out of the agreement – meaning it will not cover 80% of the population and GDP of Pacific Islands nations.

The agreement, which still includes Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific Island nations, opens developing nations up to potentially disastrous consequences. The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) and the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) have both raised these concerns publically.

The proposed agreement would have serious negative impacts for Pacific Island Nations, including but not limited to:

- **Reduced government resources to alleviate poverty** - Reduced tariff revenue, a significant part of government revenue in many Pacific island countries, could mean reduced government services for poverty alleviation in some of the poorest countries in the world, five of which are classified as least developed countries.
- **Negative Health impacts** - Non-Communicable diseases are a major problem in the region and commitments under PACER-Plus will exacerbate them through an increase in cheap, unhealthy foods as well as threats to healthy, culturally appropriate food production. This is coupled with the possible reduced government health expenditure and the brain drain of health professionals out of the Pacific;
- **Gendered impacts** - The majority of Pacific Island women are employed in infant industries, public services like nursing, and subsistence farming. Women will experience the negative impacts of PACER-Plus the most, including loss of formal and informal employment;
- **Reduced government rights to regulate for balanced development** - The ability to regulate allows governments to shape the economy in the interests of development, environmental/cultural protection and human rights. The “safeguards” for the right to regulate in current text of PACER-Plus are inadequate because they do not apply if they are not consistent with other terms of the agreement

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

“We have serious concerns about the impact of the agreement on Pacific Island nations, including its impact on local industries and local cultures.”

“The decision by Fiji and PNG to opt out of the deal means it will only cover 20% of the Pacific Island Nations’ population and GDP, a huge embarrassment for the Turnbull Government.”

“This is another in a long list of trade agreements which the Turnbull Government have rushed through which give a lot of power to employers. This agreement will have serious impacts for local industries in Pacific Island Nations.”

“This agreement will be devastating for Pacific Island Nations. The Turnbull Government is shafting millions of people to placate the business lobby.”

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