

No position on CETA without cheese, fisheries compensation details: NDP

By [BJ Siekierski](#) | Sep 17, 2015 | iPolitics

The NDP aren't prepared to take a position on the Canada-EU trade agreement (CETA) until the Conservatives reveal the details of their compensation plans for cheese producers and Newfoundland and Labrador fish processors, candidate and deputy finance critic Guy Caron said Thursday.

Though the text of the agreement has been available online for over a year, and a legal vetting or 'scrubbing' is supposed to be finished by the end of 2015, the NDP's support now appears to hinge on how the Conservatives plan to help cheese makers who will face new competition, and fish processors who will see the phase out of so-called Minimum Processing Requirements.

The proposed deal allows 17,700 tonnes of new tariff-free access for European cheese. The Conservatives have promised to "provide compensation should a negative impact be observed,"

Caron and the NDP have interpreted that as guaranteed money, which doesn't exactly seem to have been the government's position. That said, there are still unanswered questions about who would and wouldn't qualify for compensation. Those details remain outstanding.

It's much less clear when it comes to the Minimum Processing Requirements for fisheries.

Minimum Processing Requirements prevent fish from being exported without first being processed within Canada, and the provincial government in Newfoundland and Labrador understood the Harper government agreed to cough up \$280 million for an industry development and worker displacement fund.

In January, with Paul Davis' government threatening to withdraw from CETA over the Conservatives allegedly changing the terms of the fund, *iPolitics* tried unsuccessfully to determine precisely what was promised.

When Justice Minister Peter MacKay was asked in January, he said the MPR fund wasn't supposed to be a "slush fund", and would only be available if — as with cheese producers — there were demonstrable losses.

It's more or less been up in the air since.

"There's actually a main problem with the agreement that we still have no answer (for). The Conservatives have promised compensation for various sectors, including the dairy sector...and the fisheries transformation sector as well. We haven't heard any compensation yet. This is supposed to be part of the package from the government," Caron said in Ottawa Thursday.

"As long as we don't know what the Conservatives actually have promised in terms of compensation — and for what purpose — it's going to be very hard for us to actually decide specifically on the merits of the whole agreement, which is why we haven't declared our intention yet."

The problem with that argument, however, is that compensation would be in the NDP's hands if they form government.

In other words, they could make their support contingent on the affected sectors getting the appropriate amount of compensation. But that would open them up to having to do the same thing in the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) talks, which they'd probably prefer not to.

Andrew Thomson, the NDP's candidate in Eglinton-Lawrence and the party's presumed first choice for finance minister, redirected the trade discussion to TPP on Thursday — calling on the Conservatives to clarify certain negotiating positions.

Chief TPP negotiators are set to meet on [September 26](#), with a possible ministerial meeting following days later, so this could factor in to the late stages of the campaign.

“Certainly we are in an election campaign. The prime minister feels he has a mandate to sign the agreement,” Thomson said.

“We are calling very urgently for the prime minister to come clean about what the negotiating stance is, especially around the supply management and auto sectors. These are critical areas that Canadians need to have more information about what he's prepared to negotiate away before he signs.”