



::Immediate Release::

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WTO Fish deal; failing to properly address overfishing to meet SDG Mandate

Fisheries subsidies negotiations at the World Trade Organization Ministerial (WTO) Ministerial Conference are continuing to propose subsidy bans that are failing to hold the big distant water fishing fleets accountable.

As negotiations continue past their deadline, the latest circulated draft text shows major concessions being made to the large fishing fleets, in particular the distant water fleets who are appearing to have no hard prohibitions on their subsidies.

This text asks member to refrain, to the greatest extent possible to provide subsidies for distant water fishing. While there is a requirement to show that the fishing is sustainable, because there is no hard subsidy ban in place and little to hold them to account.

“The current proposals are a last-minute carve out for the biggest fleets, this represents a significant failure for the negotiations despite the hard work and resolve by many developing countries and small-island developing states to hold them to account. The intransigence of those big fishing nations to contribute to the solutions, as currently reflected in the text, will mean that any outcome fails to properly deliver for sustainability and development” comment Adam Wolfenden, Pacific Network on Globalisation.

For developing countries that catch above 0.8 per cent of global marine capture, there is a flexibility for small-scale fishers provided that the country notifies the WTO of the subsidies.

“Small-scale fishers have never been part of the problem of overfishing yet we have had to fight for our right to continue to receive government supports. Despite some improvements, under this proposal we will now only be able to receive subsidies if we tell the WTO, this undermines our sovereign rights to receive government support,” added Fikerman Saragih, The People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice (KIARA), Indonesia.

“For small-scale fishers, these negotiations have constantly represented a threat to our livelihoods and ability to fish. While there have been some improvements to protect artisanal fishers from the prohibitions in this text, we have mostly been used as a bargaining chip and distraction to avoid reigning in the large fleets,” said Olencio Simoes, National Fisherworkers Forum, India.

Helene Bank, Forum for Environment and Development, Norway, said “the WTO agreement is not contributing to saving the oceans fish stocks. As the UN Sustainability Goal 14.6 asked the WTO to do: remove such subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing and to reduce overcapacity and overfishing. Instead coastal and artisan fishers in developing countries, who are not responsible for the depletion are being disciplined. The distant waters, large, and trawling vessels, and the big subsidizers may “document” that their fishing is sustainable, and they can go free. For the oceans fishstocks and coastal societies, I predict that the WTO has developed only a notification and double reporting agreement, not saving anything but increasing administrative costs,”

Representatives from Civil Society and Fisherfolk organisations will be available to speak to media at the Ministerial.

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OWINFS is a network of organizations and social movements worldwide fighting the current model of corporate globalization embodied in the global trading system of the WTO. OWINFS is committed to a sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable multilateral trading system.

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