



Facts on Global Reform

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Stronger WTO Rules to Prohibit Fisheries Subsidies that Lead to Overexploitation and Depletion of Fish Stocks A “Win-Win-Win” for Trade, the Environment, and Sustainable Development

An historic opportunity for the WTO: With strong U.S. support, WTO Members are negotiating an agreement to “clarify and improve WTO disciplines on fisheries subsidies, taking into account the importance of this sector to developing countries” (Doha Ministerial Declaration paragraph 28). This is the first time that environmental considerations – in addition to trade priorities – led to the launch of a trade negotiation.

The stakes are high for the world’s oceans and the fishing communities that depend on them.

- Nearly a billion people depend on fish as their primary source of protein, and millions depend on fishing for all or part of their income – particularly in developing countries. Yet the productivity of fisheries has remained level since the early 1990’s, despite a significant increase in world fishing fleet capacity.
- According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 75% of the world’s fish stocks are overexploited, fully exploited, significantly depleted or recovering from overexploitation. Many of these stocks have high commercial value, including most tuna species.

High levels of fisheries subsidies worldwide are part of the problem.

- According to conservative estimates, global subsidy levels amount to at least \$15 billion annually – equivalent to more than 20% of the value of the world’s commercial fish catch. These levels contribute to overcapacity and overfishing – too many boats chasing too few fish.
- Harmful subsidies – those that lead to overcapacity and overfishing – appear to be concentrated in relatively few countries. These subsidies disadvantage fishing communities elsewhere, including in the United States.
- Developing countries are particularly harmed, since many are unable to develop their fishing industries because of competition from subsidized distant water commercial fleets.

Stronger WTO rules to prohibit the most harmful subsidies that lead to overfishing and overexploitation of fish stocks will help put the world’s fisheries back on track towards long-term sustainability, and level the playing field for fishing communities in the United States and elsewhere.

- The United States is working with a broad coalition – the “Friends of Fish,” including both developed and developing countries such as Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, Iceland, New Zealand and Peru – to press for a broad-based prohibition of the most harmful fisheries subsidies.
 - At the same time, new rules should recognize the important policy goals some fisheries programs serve – for example, those that help reduce fishing capacity and effort, or improve fisheries management and sustainability.
 - Stronger rules should also significantly improve transparency and accountability.
 - The rules will take account the needs of developing countries and provide reasonable transition periods to allow countries to adjust.
 - The rules will be carefully crafted to respect the roles of fisheries management authorities and remain within the WTO’s mandate and expertise.
- The presidents of 11 environmental organizations are strongly supportive of stronger rules on harmful fisheries subsidies and urge continued U.S. leadership on the issue.