

Agenda Item 13 Decisions and recommendations of the Eighteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade

This statement is on behalf of the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Oceana, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) and WWF.

Fisheries Subsidies

EJF, Oceana, TNC, Pew and WWF welcome the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and call on the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and WTO Members to reinforce their commitment to eliminate subsidies harmful to nature and biodiversity, expedite the acceptance of the Agreement and support its implementation.

After 21 years of discussion and negotiation, the first multilateral agreement that responds to SDG Target 14.6, linking trade and the environment, was reached by the WTO.

An effective partnership between FAO and WTO will be key to ensuring successful implementation of this agreement and SDG 14.6. As such, we would like to highlight the importance of capacity building and technical assistance being offered to developing countries.

EJF, Oceana, TNC, Pew and WWF welcome the support and collaboration offered across organizations, and we encourage the FAO to continue to provide technical and expert advice to help members ratify and implement the agreement, including to:

- Assist members with the regulative or administrative process to ensure that subsidies linked to IUU fishing are not granted or maintained, including assistance with monitoring and enforcement of those laws, as well as in the application of the notification and transparency requirements
- Enhance the coordination and cooperation with the WTO, international organizations and others to maximize the effectiveness of the WTO funding mechanism
- Assist members to ensure that national fisheries policies include sustainable fisheries subsidies programs that achieve the transition to sustainable fisheries.

FAO Members can send a strong signal to the WTO on the importance of this issue by considering both the role of the FAO and the Committee on Fisheries regarding how they can support the entry into force and implementation of the agreement.

- We encourage the FAO to continue to provide technical and expert advice to address issues related to subsidies, overfished stocks, overfishing and overcapacity, with an aim to further strengthen the Agreement, particularly in the last two disciplines as negotiations continue.
- We urge COFI to continue to support WTO members in the ongoing negotiations and remain committed ahead of the next Ministerial Conference.

EJF, Oceana, TNC, Pew and WWF further welcome and encourage FAO's proposal for a database of information about trade agreements from the perspective of fisheries and we recommend that information about fisheries subsidies and access agreements be included as part of this process.

Catch Documentation Schemes

Well-designed, digital and comprehensive Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS) can be an effective way to support the primary responsibility of the flag and market State to deter and eliminate IUU fishing and prevent illegal products from entering supply chains and reaching the consumer.

EJF, Oceana, TNC, Pew and WWF note the importance of aligning CDS and support the ongoing work of the FAO, including on the voluntary guidelines for CDS and the recently released guide on 'Understanding and implementing catch documentation schemes'. We also note progress made by stakeholder initiatives, such as NGO and industry-developed criteria which, while developed separately, broadly agree in their asks. These include better defining the catch area with a clear distinction between the High Seas and EEZs to improve traceability; including the port of landing; and mandating comprehensive information on fishing authorization, fishing gear, and catching methods.

We encourage States to work towards the expansion of CDS to cover all species and improve both information exchange and the verification of information by the competent authority. Regional and national users should be based in a common-language digital approach, e.g., live and processed weight data or the capturing of transshipment information. The use of global tools such as IMO numbers should facilitate such efforts.

We strongly encourage States to strengthen multilateral engagement between parties that are considering or are in the process of adopting such schemes and increasing the compatibility, in particular but not exclusively through digital integration, of existing and future CDS.

On behalf of EJF, Oceana, TNC, Pew, and WWF, we would like to offer our appreciation to the FAO for allowing our input at the 35th Session of the FAO COFI. As a coalition, we look forward to supporting the FAO's work and offer our policy and technical expertise to aid in advancing these key priorities to combat IUU fishing.