The World Trade Organization and global fisheries sustainability


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Abstract

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is in a unique position to move global fisheries towards sustainability. The current Doha Trade Round of Negotiations offers an important opportunity to improve the future prospects of fish as a main source of animal protein for one-fifth of the world's population. Countries are wrestling with the issue of government fishing subsidies, which keep too many commercial fishing boats in operation and drive the unsustainable exploitation of the world's depleted fish populations. Removal of subsidies is challenging as it cannot be resolved without international cooperation because unilateral action has trade implications, and may not work because fish and fishing vessels do not respect national exclusive economic zones. This is why the WTO, which has in place mechanisms to enforce its agreements, is the only institution that can tackle the global problem of overfishing subsidies. We identify the opportunities and challenges that WTO members face, and provide suggestions on how to address these challenges.

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The World Trade Organization (WTO) is in a unique position to move global fisheries towards sustainability. The current Doha Trade Round of Negotiations offers an important opportunity to improve the future prospects of fish as a main source of animal protein for one-fifth of the world's population. Countries are wrestling with the issue of government fishing subsidies, which keep too many commercial fishing boats in operation and drive the unsustainable exploitation of the world's depleted fish populations. Removal of subsidies is challenging as it cannot be resolved without interna Though global fisheries statistics seems to suggest a stabilized fisheries with annual production averaging around 80 million tons, the overfishing of local fish populations have been largely masked by landings from new fishing grounds (Pauly, Watson and Alder 2005) as well as intensification of fishing effort using new technologies, continuous geographic expansion of fishing activities and the exploitation of alternative fish stocks (Kura The World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in 1995 to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) of 1948 as a main arena to promote international liberalized trading through negotiations and formal trade agreements including fish and fishery products.