

FISHERIES' SUBSIDIES: SCOPE DIVERGENCE IN THE PROPOSED CONVERGENCE BETWEEN WTO MEMBERS

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The long-stretched issue for Fisheries Subsidies starting from the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001, and special and differential treatment (SDT) implementation in the Hong Kong round of conference in 2005 had led a path for ease of trade in marine life within the members. However, the impetus by the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specified by United Nation (UN); which specifically called off certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing and the elimination of subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing – which recognized the special and differential treatment (SDT) given to least developed and developing countries should be integral part of negotiations. Such adherence has formed adverse and undue effects on the internal trade, restricted fishing to least developed and developing countries.

Preceding ministerial conference MC12 in Geneva, Switzerland has got across the ratification of the Fisheries Subsidies up to this MC13 totaling a number of 70 member countries to submit their instrument to the WTO in this regard.

The said agreement mandates three main substantive areas in which new rules and prohibitions have been agreed: (1) subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing (2) subsidies for fishing and fishing-related activities regarding overfished stocks and (3) other subsidies, including those provided to fishing on the unregulated high seas, to re-flagged vessels, and to fishing on unassessed stocks. However, in an industrial perspective, the number of developing countries has massive industrial fishing fleets which indeed impacts marine life in adverse manner. The giant business conglomerates of developed countries are fishing in distant waters, and exploiting the ocean resources, causing depletion of marine life. Hence the agreement which overlooks the reality and enforces developing and least developed countries to waive of the subsidies will be injustice to the fishermen from the counterparts. Such repercussions are incomparable to the small troops of fishermen from developing and least developed countries.

Adherence to this agreement, developed countries will reduce or cut off the subsidies for the conservation of marines with an exception clause under it. The WTO needs to understand that all member countries are not on equal footing. It is required to redefine the scope in Article 1 of the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM) and Article 2 as well. Hence, re-canvassing of the obligations and defining the scope of stakeholder will play a role of catalyst in order to maintain balance in trade and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in close future.

We express our strong disagreement with this ratification process and request the other member countries not to hurry and be victimized of unprecedented future repercussions of this agreement.
