

2020 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14

2 to 6 June 2020

Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions

1. Introduction

The Ministerial Decision of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference held in Buenos Aires on 10 to 13 December 2017 noted the progress made in the negotiations on disciplines for fisheries subsidies since the previous Ministerial Conference in 2015 and stated that the negotiations would continue with a view to adopting, by the Ministerial Conference in 2019, an agreement on comprehensive and effective disciplines that would meet the terms of SDG objective 14.6. In July 2018, the General Council of the WTO agreed that the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference would take place in June 2020 in Nur-Sultan in Kazakhstan on the understanding that negotiators would aim to complete the negotiations on fisheries subsidies by the end of 2019.

Although considerable progress was made during 2019, particularly in certain areas, the negotiations were not completed by year-end. WTO Members have confirmed their commitment to reaching a meaningful outcome at the 12th Ministerial Conference scheduled for 8 to 11 June 2020 that will conform to the mandate in SDG 14.6, as incorporated into the Ministerial Decision from the 11th Ministerial Conference.

2. Process

Since the adoption of Resolution 73/292, the negotiations on disciplines to fisheries subsidies in the Negotiating Group on Rules in the WTO became more intense, particularly since the mandate and deadline were reaffirmed by the 11th Ministerial Conference in December 2017.

An intensive and complex period of work was concluded at the end of 2018 with the consolidation of several proposals into a single working document (TN/RL/274/Rev.6). Then, starting in early 2019, a new phase of negotiations began based on this working document and new proposals from Members. The Chair's work is supported by six facilitators appointed by the Chair based on recommendations from Members. The current Chair and the facilitators appointed by his predecessor are engaged in detailed discussions on disciplines to subsidies that contribute to: illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; fishing of overfished stocks; overcapacity and overfishing; and a number of cross-cutting issues which include special and differential treatment, disputes, remedies for non-compliance, and transparency and notifications.

To conclude the negotiations by the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference, Members have agreed to an intensified programme of work for the period January-June 2020. The Chair and facilitators are working closely with Members to further advance draft negotiating texts.

3. Principal issues

Members have focused on the mandate while recognizing the limits to the competence of the WTO, which is not a fisheries management organization, and within those limits are working to establish subsidies disciplines that address the sustainability issues identified in the mandate. In common with any negotiation to discipline subsidies, different issues are closely related and interdependent. Therefore, for many Members each issue is important and an acceptable outcome in one area of the fisheries subsidies negotiations depends on the final form of the disciplines in other areas, including the future monitoring of the application of these disciplines and dispute settlement related to them.