



Countdown to Reducing Harmful Fisheries Subsidies

2019 Calendar



Global agreement in 2019 would help boost ocean health.

With too many boats chasing too few fish, it's time for a change. World Trade Organization (WTO) members can take a critical step in 2019 by agreeing to reduce government subsidies that support overfishing and illegal fishing and therefore contribute to worldwide declines in fish stocks.

Governments provide about US\$20 billion a year on damaging types of fisheries subsidies, primarily to industrial fishers, to offset costs such as fuel, gear, and vessel construction. But WTO members have committed to negotiate and adopt an agreement to curb harmful fisheries subsidies by December.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is working with WTO members, scientists, and other stakeholders to secure an agreement that will substantially reduce subsidies that are harmful to ocean health. Action by the end of 2019 would be in line with the December 2017 WTO ministerial decision and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on the ocean—SDG 14.6—which call for reducing subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, while eliminating those that contribute to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by 2020.

Although reducing the harmful effects of subsidized fishing has been on the WTO agenda for almost two decades, the time has come to agree on meaningful action. Given the scope, magnitude, and effects of harmful fisheries, eliminating them would help curtail overfishing and ensure that the ocean continues to provide food and support jobs far into the future.



January

The World Trade Organization (WTO) must act this year to eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies. Like this ship crossing choppy seas, negotiators must navigate skilfully to achieve the December 2017 WTO ministerial declaration's call for members to reach an agreement by the end of 2019 on "comprehensive and effective disciplines that prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing."

 **11 MONTHS TO GO**

T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T	W	TH							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31



February

Healthy oceans matter for people and fish. Worldwide, more than 1 billion people depend on seafood as a main source of protein, and more than 40 million—like this employee at a fish processing plant in Joal, Senegal—rely directly on fishing for their income. Workers at the plant, most of whom are women, dry, salt, and smoke the fish for transport. Because of decreased catches caused by industrial fishing, this woman says she now receives about a third of the wages she did in 2010.

 **10 MONTHS TO GO**

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March

Overfishing is pushing many fish populations—and marine ecosystems—to the brink. A vessel uses a purse seine net to bring in a large catch. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that 93 per cent of marine fisheries worldwide are fished at or beyond sustainable catch levels.

 **9 MONTHS TO GO**

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April

Too many boats are chasing too few fish. Governments spend an estimated US\$20 billion on capacity-enhancing — or harmful — subsidies that offset fishing costs such as fuel, gear, and vessel construction, and allow fishers to travel farther for longer — which often leads to fishing above sustainable biological limits.

 **8 MONTHS TO GO**

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May

Subsidies support some otherwise unprofitable and often unsustainable fishing activities. The ocean is vast, but subsidies have encouraged fishing throughout global waters. In fact, without subsidies, as much as 54 per cent of high seas fishing grounds would be unprofitable at current fishing rates, according to a 2018 study in the journal Science Advances, "The Economics of Fishing the High Seas." Government aid also supports destructive and expensive fishing practices such as high seas bottom trawling, an industrial fishing method in which ships drag funnel-shaped nets across the sea floor.

 **7 MONTHS TO GO**

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June

Subsidies should not reward illegal behaviour. Marine life, like this dusky shark swimming near a school of fish, is at risk of being caught by fishers engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. These practices undermine management efforts and penalize those who respect the rules. Some fishers receive subsidies while engaging in such illegal activities as forging catch documents or ships' logs. Fishing outside the law can also provide cover for other illicit activities such as drug trafficking.

 **6 MONTHS TO GO**

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July

Illicit activities affect the environment and the economy. Atlantic bluefin tuna, extremely valuable to fishers, swim in the Atlantic Ocean off the Azores. Historically, harvesting these tremendous predators has been subsidized, and the stock continues to suffer from the effects of overfishing and vessels operating outside the law. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated practices are estimated to cost the global economy more than US\$23 billion annually and represent up to 1 in every 5 wild-caught fish. Insufficient enforcement of existing rules, along with the promise of short-term profits, has fostered a culture of overfishing and illegal activities. Both the World Trade Organization's ministerial mandate and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on the ocean emphasize that subsidies that enable illicit methods must be eliminated in any new WTO agreement.

 **5 MONTHS TO GO**

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August

Some subsidies drive inequality. Most assistance goes to large-scale industrial operations rather than to small-scale fishers such as this man in the Philippines, who tends to a net underwater. The average fish worker in a least-developed country receives only US\$1, compared with approximately US\$5 of fisheries subsidies given to fish workers in the rest of the world.

 **4 MONTHS TO GO**

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September

Rebounding fish stocks benefit the oceans and people. Allowing fish stocks to bounce back to healthier levels would not only help ensure long-term economic viability for people in many coastal communities, such as this Senegalese man carrying a crate of freshly caught fish. It would also assist fisheries in adapting to climate change and help meet global demand for seafood.

 3 MONTHS TO GO

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October

Reforming fisheries subsidies could revitalize the World Trade Organization. Confidence in the institution, based in Geneva, would rise if members could ensure that subsidies negotiations would reach a successful conclusion.

 2 MONTHS TO GO

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November

Redirect government funds to improve fisheries management. Governments can stem the flow of capacity-enhancing subsidies and reduce pressure on fish stocks, such as these cod. The funding could be used instead to enhance sustainable fisheries management programs and research to ensure healthy stocks.

 **1 MONTH TO GO**

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December

This is the World Trade Organization's legacy. Just as the sun sets on this fisher, time is running out on the opportunity for WTO members to help fishers like him—and contribute to improving the health of the world's oceans—by reining in harmful subsidies.



S	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	M	T							
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