



New Fisheries Subsidies Deal Now Needs Implementation

To curb overfishing and illegal fishing, countries must move to fulfill their mandates

Overview

With a World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement to curb harmful fisheries subsidies newly in place, it's finally time for governments to implement this critical deal.

The landmark WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in 2022, entered into force in September 2025 after two-thirds of the institution's membership ratified it. The agreement is designed to address harmful fishing subsidies – payments that governments make to commercial fishing operators to keep those businesses profitable but that also incentivize overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The subsidies that qualify as harmful – and not all do – allow industrial fleets to afford longer trips, which enable them to sail farther out to sea and harvest more fish than is sustainable. And that, in turn, depletes fish stocks faster than they can recover.

But under the agreement, WTO Member States bound to the deal have agreed to no longer provide subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing, enable fishing of overfished stocks, or support fishing of unmanaged stocks on the high seas. Additionally, they have agreed to new notification and transparency requirements that will help the WTO – and the world – better understand where and how fisheries subsidies are being spent.

The deal lays out clear reporting requirements and timelines for when Member States and relevant WTO bodies (councils, committees, etc.) should submit certain information. The agreement also establishes a Committee on Fisheries Subsidies, slated to meet at least twice a year to assess the implementation of the agreement and review the information required from Member States.

Tasks under new fisheries subsidies deal

WTO Member States and the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies must complete certain tasks under the agreement. For example, Member States must notify the committee by September 2026 of any national laws and regulations relevant to implementing the deal. The data the WTO collects from the tasks listed in Table 1 will help the organization understand where the agreement is working well and where it may need improvement.

WTO Member States' Tasks

Immediately: States must inform the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies of:

- Any regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) they belong to.
- The area and species under each relevant RFMO's jurisdiction.
- The conservation and management measures implemented by those RFMOs.
- The status of the stocks managed by those RFMOs.
- The vessels and operators identified by those RFMOs to be engaged in IUU fishing.

By September 2026: States must inform the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies of:

- Measures taken to ensure implementation of the agreement.
- Their fisheries regime, including laws, regulations and administrative procedures relevant to the agreement.

Annually: States must inform the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies of vessels and operators identified to be engaged in IUU fishing.

Recurring: States must inform the WTO of:

- The type of fishing activity being subsidized.
- The conservation status of targeted fish stocks, as well as the reference points – the benchmarks that managers use to assess a stock – used for that evaluation.
- The location of the stock – specifically whether it's in another Member State's exclusive economic zone or within an RFMO's purview.
- The conservation and management measures that are in place for the relevant stock.
- Capacity of the fleet targeting that stock – for example, the size, equipment and operational characteristics of the vessels, such as engine power.
- The name and identification number of the fishing vessel(s) that are benefiting from a subsidy.
- Related catch data by species, or group of species, in the targeted stocks.

WTO Committee on Fisheries Subsidies' Tasks

Immediately: The committee must elect a chair and member representatives and schedule at least two meetings a year.

Annually: The committee must track the implementation of the agreement and provide key findings to the WTO Council for Trade in Goods, a subsidiary body that reports directly to the General Council.

At least every two years: The committee must examine all required information provided by Member States, including the conservation and management measures that are in place for relevant fish stocks.

By September 2030, and every three years thereafter: The committee must examine the agreement and propose amendments to improve its efficiency and operation if it deems them necessary.

Recurring: The committee must maintain close contact with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and other international institutions working in fisheries management, including RFMOs.

Tools and funding to support global compliance

Fortunately, the WTO has resources available to help countries adhere to these rules, including a “[fish fund](#),” created by the agreement, to help developing and least-developed Member States to implement the deal. Countries can apply for that funding to assess how well they are already complying with WTO rules and identify what further steps they need to take.

With support from Pew, the International Institute for Sustainable Development created a [self-assessment tool](#) that can help governments collect the key information and data they are required to submit to the WTO, determine what domestic policies they need to change (if any) and identify capacity-building and technical assistance needs.

WTO Member States should leverage these resources to ensure swift and efficient implementation of the new agreement.

Agreement progress hinges on follow-through

Even as all this is happening, WTO Member States are still deliberating key unresolved issues that are not addressed in the agreement, including reducing subsidies that enable overcapacity and overfishing. The WTO gave itself four years from the agreement’s entry into force to adopt rules on these outstanding topics; if that doesn’t happen by September 2029, the deal will expire (unless otherwise agreed by the WTO).

WTO Member States must not lose momentum. They have made historic progress to protect fisheries across the globe, but the work is not done. Countries must transparently implement and strengthen the agreement with new rules to help ensure a thriving future for ocean life, and the people who depend on it.

For more information, please visit: pew.org/fisheriessubsidies

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