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 Fisheries

WTO Don't Fall Behind adopts first global rules to curb harmful fisheries subsidies

The Responsible Seafood Advocate: Delivered

22 September 2025

By Responsible Seafood Advocate

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WTO's new pact bans harmful fisheries subsidies that drive overfishing, aiming to protect marine stocks and promote sustainability

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) new pact is now in effect, establishing the first global rules to curb harmful fisheries subsidies that fuel overfishing and promote more sustainable use of marine resources.

At a special General Council meeting on September 15, WTO members marked the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which targets billions of dollars in government support that contribute to the depletion of global fish stocks. Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala called the accord – the WTO's first treaty centered on sustainability – a “landmark for global trade governance.”

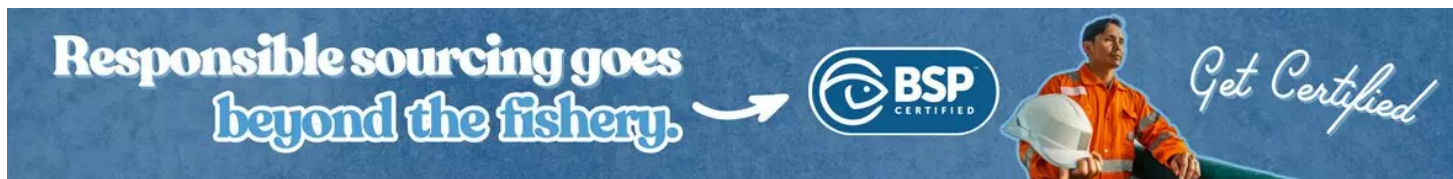
“This Agreement demonstrates how you can put trade in the service of both people and planet,” she said.

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The World Trade Organization's (WTO) new fisheries pact is now in effect, establishing the first global rules to curb harmful fisheries subsidies that fuel overfishing and promote more sustainable use of marine resources. Photo courtesy of the WTO.

The agreement prohibits subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (or **IUU fishing** (<https://www.globalseafood.org/advocate/topic/iuu-fishing/>)), for operations targeting overfished stocks and for fishing on the unregulated high seas. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 35.5 percent of global fish stocks were overfished in 2021, compared with 10 percent in 1974. Marine fishing subsidies are estimated at \$35 billion annually, of which about \$22 billion are considered harmful.



(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

At the meeting, Okonjo-Iweala received instruments of acceptance from Brazil, Kenya, Viet Nam and Tonga, pushing ratifications past the two-thirds threshold required for the pact to take effect. Mali and Oman have also ratified and are expected to complete the process soon.

“At a time when the international trading system faces profound challenges, the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies sends a powerful signal that WTO members can work together in a spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility to deliver solutions to global challenges,” said Okonjo-Iweala. “The entry into force of this Agreement stands as a reminder that many of the biggest challenges we face are more effectively addressed at the multilateral level. People and nations need a multilateralism that delivers – which is why today is so reassuring.”

Delegates described the accord as a milestone for the WTO, saying it underscored commitment to the multilateral trading system and to advancing sustainability. Members pledged to begin implementation, citing its role in restoring fish stocks, protecting livelihoods and supporting global food security.

To help developing and least-developed countries meet new obligations, ministers created the WTO Fish Fund, which has raised more than \$18 million and opened its first call for project proposals in June. Oversight will come from a new Committee on Fisheries Subsidies, tasked with increasing transparency and maintaining regular dialogue on governments’ fishing practices.

“I strongly encourage all remaining members to complete their acceptances without delay,” Okonjo-Iweala said. “One of my key aspirations is to see the Agreement ratified by all members by the 14th Ministerial Conference [scheduled for March 2026], where we will have the opportunity to celebrate this collective achievement together.”

The list of WTO members that have deposited their instruments of acceptance of the Agreement with the WTO can be found [here](#)

(https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_acceptances_e.htm). A fact sheet outlining the objectives and benefits of the Agreement can be found [here](#)

(https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_factsheet_e.pdf).

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