

New initiatives launched to intensify WTO work on trade and the environment

Two proponent groups launched new initiatives to intensify discussions at the WTO on trade and the environment on 17 November, the second day of the WTO's Trade and Environment Week. The initiatives establish structured discussions on trade and environmental sustainability and an informal dialogue on plastics pollution.

Fifty members said they would organize structured discussions for interested WTO members to advance work on trade and environmental sustainability. This would include by promoting transparency and information sharing, identifying areas for future work within the WTO, supporting technical assistance and capacity building needs, particularly for least-developed countries, and working on "deliverables" of environmental sustainability in the various areas of the WTO. The group intends to complement the existing work of the Committee on Trade and Environment and other relevant WTO committees and bodies. A first meeting will be scheduled in early 2021 with participation open to all WTO members.

The proponents' Communication on Trade and Environmental Sustainability is [here](#). The members that have sponsored this communication are Australia; Canada; Chad; Chile; Costa Rica; the European Union; Gambia; Fiji; Iceland; Japan; Korea; Liechtenstein; Maldives; Mexico; Moldova; Montenegro; New Zealand; North Macedonia; Norway; Senegal; the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu; Switzerland; and the United Kingdom.

The structured discussions seek to propel new ideas and will be open to third parties and experts, Ambassador Gloria Abraham Peralta of Costa Rica said at the online launch. By the 12th Ministerial Conference, proponents aim to bring in more members and further develop the work programme of the structured discussions, said Ambassador Stephen de Boer of Canada.

WTO Deputy Director-General Alan Wolff, speaking at the online event, said the group's work programme could contribute to eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers in environmental goods and services, further work on a declaration made at the 11th Ministerial Conference on reforming inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and promoting a global circular economy by facilitating trade along supply chains. It could also contribute to strengthening links between trade and climate action, including by collaborating on schemes addressing the carbon content of trade products, and helping the smallest and poorest countries secure green financing. The full text of his speech is [here \(https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/ddgaw_17nov20_e.htm\)](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/ddgaw_17nov20_e.htm).

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Informal dialogue on plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade

On plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade, seven members have launched an open-ended informal dialogue to which all WTO members are invited to participate. The dialogue is borne out of the recognition of the need for coordinated action to address the rising environmental, health and economic cost of plastics pollution and the importance of the trade dimension as a solution.

Proponents aim to circulate their communication soon. The seven members that have sponsored the communication so far are Australia, Barbados, Canada, China, Fiji, Jamaica and Morocco.

Ambassador Xiangchen Zhang of China said at the online event that possible subjects for discussion include improving transparency, monitoring trade trends, promoting best practices, strengthening policy coherence, identifying the scope for collective approaches, assessing capacity and technical assistance needs, and cooperating with other international processes and efforts. Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan of Fiji said they hope this informal dialogue will encourage discussion and exploratory work on how the WTO can contribute to efforts to reduce plastics pollution and transition to a circular, more environmentally sustainable plastics trade.

DDG Wolff said a revived Environmental Goods Agreement negotiation could contribute to better plastics trade by reducing barriers to substitutes and waste management equipment. It would be useful, he added, to define principles for effective and coherent trade measures that tackle plastics pollution and are compatible with WTO rules, to set targets for reducing trade in non-sustainable plastics, to establish a monitoring mechanism to track relevant trade measures, and to enhance support for capacity building through Aid for Trade and the Enhanced Integrated Framework. The full text of his speech is [here \(https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/ddgaw_17nov20a_e.htm\)](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/ddgaw_17nov20a_e.htm).

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