

WTO members committed to keeping up momentum in fisheries subsidies negotiations

WTO members aim to build on the momentum achieved this year during fisheries subsidies negotiations and forge an agreement early in 2021 as their contribution to securing the future of the world's oceans. The chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Santiago Wills of Colombia, said that despite difficulties caused by COVID-19-related disruptions to the talks real progress was made in 2020 and that members are determined to build on the progress and bring the negotiations to conclusion.

"While I am disappointed that we will miss the 2020 deadline, I am not discouraged," the chair said after reporting to members at the 14 December informal meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee at the level of heads of delegations. "The momentum is there and we must not waste it. At this critical juncture, we need members to close the gaps and deliver a meaningful agreement soon."

Based on the mandate from the WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference and the UN Sustainable Development Goal Target 14.6, negotiators have been given the task of securing an agreement on disciplines to eliminate subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, with special and differential treatment being an integral part of the negotiations.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, members have deliberated on how the pandemic may affect timelines for concluding negotiations. In March 2020, while preparations for a draft consolidated text were underway, in-person meetings in the WTO were suspended due to the pandemic. The 12th Ministerial Conference, originally scheduled for 8-11 June 2020 in Kazakhstan, had to be postponed and has not yet been rescheduled.

Members nevertheless used written exchanges and online meetings to conduct the negotiations. The chair circulated in June a first draft of a consolidated text for the agreement, which was revised in early November. Ambassadors and capital officials have been highly engaged and members have remarked on the improved understanding of the highly complex technical issues that underlie the negotiations.

"Members had mixed views on the timeline for 2020 in light of COVID-19 disruptions but all are determined to deliver a meaningful outcome. Based on my consultations, all members are determined to bring this negotiation to the finish line," the chair said.

A new schedule for meetings in the new year is being finalized, with members keeping in mind several convening opportunities for ministers in 2021.

A factsheet on the fisheries subsidies negotiations is available [here \(https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_intro_e.htm\)](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_intro_e.htm).

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