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News



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Nearly 300 Scientists Ask the WTO to Ban Harmful Fisheries Subsidies

Signatories stated that certain subsidies only incentivize overcapacity and lead to overfishing

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UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Two hundred and ninety scientific researchers from 46 countries, and 6 continents, are asking members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to take the bold step and pass a motion to ban harmful fisheries subsidies at their 12th Ministerial Conference that will take place from November 30 to December 3, 2021, in Geneva.

[In an open letter](#), published in *Science*, and spearheaded by Dr. Rashid Sumaila, professor in the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries and School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, and Canada Research Chair in Interdisciplinary Ocean and Fisheries Economics, the scientists stated that the WTO is in the unique position to pass an effective international agreement that could eliminate subsidies for fuel, distant-water and destructive fishing fleets, and illegal and unregulated vessels.

Citing a comprehensive body of research, the signatories stated that government payments that lower the cost of fuel and vessel construction; provide price support to keep market prices artificially high, and back fleets that plunder the high seas, only incentivize overcapacity and lead to overfishing. This, the scientists said, actively contravenes the aims of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 14, which is to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development."

In their view, the 164 states represented at the WTO could use their upcoming meeting to sign an agreement that forbids such harmful practices, while allowing special and differential treatments for small-scale, sustainably managed wild fisheries that support food and nutritional security, livelihoods, and cultures, particularly in low-income countries.

Further, the researchers said that such a deal should support low-income countries' efforts to meet their commitments and transition to sustainable management. Finally, the agreement should require transparent data documentation and enforcement measures.

In addition to Sumaila, some of the high-profile signatories to the letter include

the Sea Around Us principal investigator, Dr. Daniel Pauly (Sea Around Us, UBC Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries), Dr. Werner Antweiler (UBC Sauder School of Business), Dr. Philippe Cury (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement), Dr. Paul Ehrlich (Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford University), Dr. Michelle Tigchelaar (Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions), Dr. Natalie Ban (University of Victoria), Dr. Lisa Levin (Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California), Dr. Simon Levin (Princeton University), Dr. Elena Bennett (McGill University), Dr. Enric Sala (National Geographic, Pristine Seas), Karen C. Seto (Yale University), Paul Onyango (University of Dar es Salaam), Fiorenza Micheli (Hopkins Marine Station, Stanford University), Kristina Gjerde (IUCN Global Marine and Polar Programme), Christina Hicks (Lancaster University), Masahide Kaeriyama (Hokkaido University), Ibukun J. Adewumi (African Marine Environment Sustainability Initiative), and others.

- *This press release was provided by the [University of British Columbia](#)*

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In Focus



Two glasses of orange juice and two oranges on a black background

LAB MANAGER