UWA scientists join international push to ban harmful fisheries subsidies

Three hundred scientists from 255 institutions in 46 countries, including Professor Dirk Zeller and PhD candidate Lincoln Hood from The University of Western Australia, are asking members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ban harmful fisheries subsidies at the 12th Ministerial Conference to be held in Geneva, Switzerland next month.

In an open letter published in Science and spearheaded by Professor Rashid Sumaila, Canada Research Chair in Interdisciplinary Ocean and Fisheries Economics at the University of British Columbia, the researchers say that the WTO has a unique opportunity to pass an effective agreement that eliminates subsidies for fuel, distant-water and destructive fishing fleets, and illegal and unregulated vessels.

Citing a comprehensive body of research, the signatories explain that government payments that lower the cost of fuel and vessel construction, support fleets that plunder the high seas, incentivise overcapacity and lead to overfishing. As a result, they contravene the aims of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 14.6.

In their view, the 164 states represented at the WTO can use the 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.

Underpinned by transparent data documentation and enforcement measures, the researchers say the deal should also foster accountability by supporting low-income countries' efforts to meet their commitments and transition to sustainable management.

Professor of Marine Conservation and Director Sea Around Us – Indian Ocean, Professor Zeller said the researchers hoped the letter would urge the WTO members to take a bold step and pass the
Let’s grab this chance for real and effective change,” Professor Zeller said.

Tags: Australia, British, Canada, Fisheries, fishing fleets, Geneva, Lincoln, marine conservation, Switzerland, United Nations, university, University of British Columbia, University of Western Australia, UWA, Western Australia, wild fisheries, WTO

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