

WTO Inputs

UNSG Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea

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WTO AGREEMENT ON FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

The [Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies \(AFS\)](#) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which entered into force on 15 September 2025, prohibits some of the most harmful forms of fisheries subsidies. It will contribute to efforts to ensure environmentally sustainable fisheries and the protection of livelihoods. The newly established multilateral rules prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, for overfished stocks and for fishing on the high seas outside the competence of a RFMO/A. As of April 2026, 119 WTO Members have deposited their instruments of acceptance of the AFS.

Following the entry into force of the AFS, the Committee of Fisheries Subsidies has been established. To ensure effective implementation and operation of the Agreement, the Committee of Fisheries Subsidies is mandated to examine fisheries subsidies-related notifications and other relevant information submitted by the WTO Members, as well as serving as a forum for Members to maintain dialogue on their subsidized fishing practices. Centralized information on fisheries subsidies is expected to contribute to increased transparency of governments' practices.

WTO FISHERIES FUNDING MECHANISM

With the entry into force of the AFS, the [WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism](#), known as the Fish Fund, has become fully operational and has begun disbursing funds. The Fish Fund is a dedicated multilateral trust fund supporting developing and least-developed members in implementing the AFS.

In November 2025, under its first Call for Proposals, the Steering Committee approved 26 grants totaling approximately USD 3 million, covering both preparatory work and concrete implementation activities across various regions.

To date, 18 WTO Members have contributed approximately USD 20 million to the Fund, ensuring a strong financial foundation for ongoing technical assistance. A Call for Proposals is currently ongoing, reflecting the Fund's objective of conducting at least two calls for proposals per calendar year to maintain momentum and provide steady support to its members.

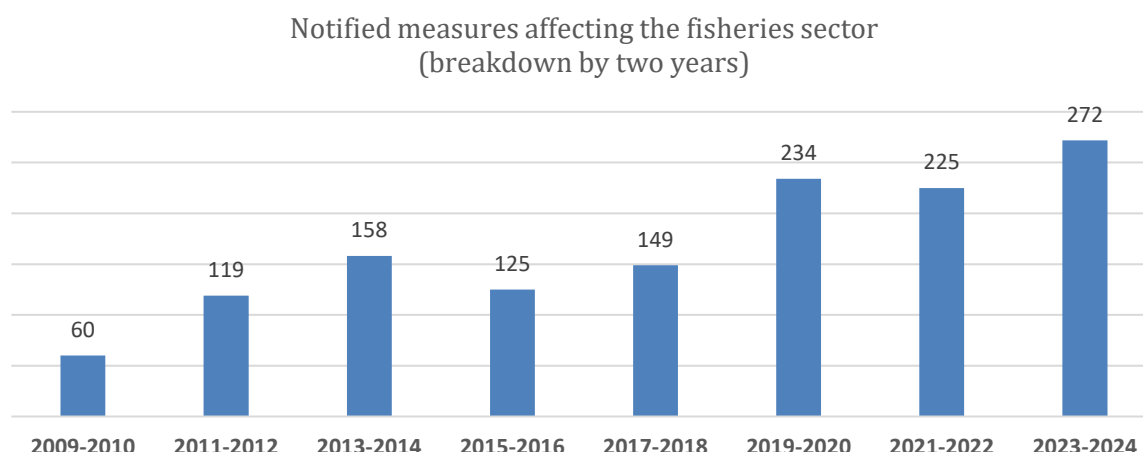
TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT

TRADE & OCEAN SUSTAINABILITY, MARINE POLLUTION, AND THE BLUE ECONOMY

On ocean sustainability, whether - the blue or ocean economy or sustainable fish trade - many WTO Members have expressed their interest to examine the trade and environment nexus with a view to explore the "win-win" opportunities where trade and the environment can be mutually supportive.

WTO Members have stepped up work on trade, climate change and sustainability issues at the [WTO Committee on Trade and Environment \(CTE\)](#). In the context of Oceans and SDG Goal 14, there has been exchange of views on policy tools such as subsidies, catch certification schemes, eco-labels and traceability requirements (tracing fisheries across the supply chain from "fish to plate" or from "sea to shop"). WTO Members and IGOs (such as the FAO, UNCTAD, OECD and UNEP) have presented their activities, toolkits and experiences, for example, on the steps taken to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In developing tools, some have highlighted the importance of keeping in mind principles such as non-discrimination, transparency and, wherever possible, the harmonization of measures adopted. The need for awareness generation, international co-operation, technical assistance, and capacity building has also been emphasized. On the margins of the CTE, several side events have been organized, with the next [WTO Trade and Environment Week](#) to be held from 1 to 5 June 2026.

There has also been increased transparency on trade and environmental measures affecting the fisheries sector that may be relevant to the implementation of SDG Goal 14 and the Law of the Sea. Between 2009 and 2024, the [WTO Environmental Database](https://edb.wto.org/) recorded 1342 notified measures and 1468 entries from WTO Members' trade policy review (TPR) reports that were related to the fisheries sector. Moreover, over this period, there were 1098 notified measures specifically with the objective of sustainable fisheries management. WTO members continue to notify and adopt trade policies to contribute to the sustainable development of their fisheries sector and more broadly the blue economy (figure xx).



Source: WTO Environmental Database: <https://edb.wto.org/>

Note: data has been aggregated into two-years periods to reduce year-on-year fluctuation caused by the notifications of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures submitted on a biennial basis, resulting in some year-on-year variations in the environment-related notifications and measures.

The main policy tools used by WTO Members to pursue environmental objectives in the fisheries sector are support measures, followed by import licences and quantitative restrictions. Nearly one-half of these measures are notified by developing and least developed countries.

In addition, the periodical WTO Members' Trade Policy Review (TPR) reports, sheds light on the domestic and regional policies tackling fisheries and the blue economy as a sector. Table xx gathers examples of ongoing policies and action plans implemented by different WTO Members:

Table xx: Select Trade Policies for the Blue Economy

WTO Member	Trade-related policy	Document reference
Cabo Verde	Gender Strategy for the fisheries sector 2022-2026. Untapped potential for gender-inclusive trade in the blue economy.	WT/TPR/S/471/Rev.1
Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)	OECS Common Tourism Policy to include the blue economy to increase the sector's competitiveness.	WT/TPR/G/437
Seychelles	Blue Economy Strategic Framework and Roadmap 2018-2030 with the aim of making maximum use of its 1,358 million km ² of ocean in the most sustainable manner possible.	WT/TPR/S/433/REV.1

Mauritius	"Vision 2030" Strategy to tap into the economic potential of the ocean and promote the blue economy as one of Mauritius' main development pillars.	WT/TPR/G/417
European Union	The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund 2021-2027 supports: (iii) a sustainable blue economy and fishing and aquaculture communities; and (iv) strengthening international ocean governance and sustainable management	WT/TPR/S/442/REV.1
Canada	Blue Economy Regulatory Review conducted in 2022 to remove barriers for Canada's ocean industries and promote innovation and sustainable growth.	WT/TPR/S/455/REV.1

Source: WTO Environmental Database: <https://edb.wto.org/>

Work on trade and ocean sustainability has also been carried forward by WTO member-led initiatives. The [Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions \(TESSD\)](#) aims to advance discussions on trade and environmental sustainability at the WTO. The initiative currently includes 79 WTO Members, covers more than 85% of global trade and is open to all WTO Members. TESSD has involved stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, international organizations and academia, enriching the WTO discourse on the SDGs and sustainability. Through its substantive discussions, TESSD has, inter alia, identified trade-related policies to advance a circular economy and climate action, compiled indicative lists of environmental goods and services (EGS), and mapped subsidy design considerations that support the low-carbon transition. The group presented a "package" of outcomes reflecting and summarizing such technical work at the WTO 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé in March 2026.

In the context of the blue economy and SDG 14, TESSD has advanced work on maritime transport decarbonization, pollution from global value chains, technologies for water supply and waste management, as well as ocean-based renewable energy. On maritime decarbonization, Members exchanged experiences on subsidies and incentive schemes supporting the uptake of green maritime fuels, alongside cleaner port operations, and the development of green shipping corridors. The initiative has also discussed pollution generated along global value chains in textiles, electronics, and batteries, including microplastic pollution and marine eutrophication caused by chemical runoff.

Members have further discussed approaches to promote and facilitate trade in EGS, compiling a non-exhaustive and illustrative list. The lists include goods related to sustainable water infrastructure and ocean-based renewable energy, including offshore wind, marine and wave energy. It also covers services related to designing, building, operating, and maintaining water and energy infrastructure, which include nature and landscape protection services to safeguard marine ecosystems.

On plastics, including marine pollution, the [WTO Dialogue on Plastic Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade \(DPP\)](#) brings together 83 WTO Members – covering close to 90% of global plastics trade – to examine how enhanced international trade cooperation can contribute to domestic, regional and global efforts to reduce plastic pollution and promote more environmentally sustainable plastics trade. Since its launch in 2020, the Dialogue has served as a platform for Member-driven discussions, experience sharing and technical work on the trade-related dimensions of plastic pollution, focusing on practical issues such as improving transparency and monitoring of plastics trade flows, including plastics embedded in products and packaging; examining approaches to address single-use plastics; identifying good practices in the design and implementation of trade-related plastic measures; facilitating access to goods, services and technologies for environmentally sound waste management and clean-up; and promoting trade in safe and effective non-plastic

substitutes and alternatives. This work draws on Members' existing policies and experiences, as well as inputs from international organizations and other stakeholders.

The work of the Dialogue is closely linked to ocean sustainability, as reflected in the [Ministerial Statement and its accompanying technical outcomes](#), issued at the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference. DPP discussions have highlighted that plastic pollution is a transboundary challenge, with leakages occurring at multiple stages and ultimately affecting the marine environment as the final sink of plastic pollution. A recurring theme has been the need to improve data and transparency on plastics trade flows, including plastics embedded in products and the fate of plastic waste, which limit the ability of policymakers to identify leakage hotspots, including into aquatic environments. In response, Members have explored statistical approaches and international cooperation to improve monitoring and traceability of plastics throughout their lifecycle, as a basis for more targeted and effective interventions.

Members have also shared experiences with trade-related plastic measures, particularly those targeting single-use plastics, which are among the most frequently identified sources of marine litter. Discussions have highlighted the fragmentation of regulatory approaches and the associated challenges for effective implementation, including risks of illegal trade and diversion of plastic waste, underscoring the importance of enhanced policy coherence, transparency and international cooperation. These efforts are seen as critical to reducing the flow of plastics into oceans and other aquatic environments.

Complementing these efforts, the Dialogue has examined the role of trade in facilitating access to goods, services and technologies for environmentally sound waste management and clean-up activities, including those relevant to marine environments. Discussions have covered specific solutions for marine debris, such as the retrieval of lost fishing gear and the clean-up of coastal and ocean areas. Members have also identified a range of trade-related barriers affecting the deployment of such solutions, including constraints related to access to technology, financing, services, and cross-border operations. Improving access to such solutions is considered essential to addressing mismanaged waste and preventing further marine pollution, particularly in regions with limited waste management capacity.

In parallel, discussions have highlighted the potential role of oceans as sources of environmentally sound alternatives, including marine-based materials such as seaweed, while noting the need to ensure their sustainability and to address trade barriers affecting their development and uptake. Members have also emphasized the broader environmental, economic and social impacts of plastic pollution on marine ecosystems, including effects on biodiversity as well as on ocean-based sectors such as fisheries and tourism, particularly in coastal and island economies. In this regard, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have highlighted their particular vulnerability to marine plastic pollution.

Overall, the WTO Dialogue underscores the importance of international cooperation through trade-related approaches, in order to support comprehensive and effective responses to plastic pollution and its impacts on the marine environment.
