



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

MC11 Focus: Fisheries Subsidies

Fisheries subsidies, and particularly Target 14.6 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹, is one of the issues World Trade Organization (WTO) Members hope to deliver on at the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires this December (MC11).

There are two separate negotiations currently taking place on this issue: a plurilateral negotiation also called “fisheries subsidies agreement or FSA” which involves several countries including Argentina, Canada, and the U.S., and the multilateral talks held in the context of the negotiating group on rules. Both are aiming for the same outcome i.e. the so-called Target 14.6, which New Zealand and the EU hope to deliver at the MC11 to continue the WTO's contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Speaking on behalf of the FSA, Canada said the plurilateral track was complementary to the multilateral negotiations and that the FSA remains open to any WTO Member willing to participate. The group is exploring alternatives and more flexible pathways to follow through with the SDGs by developing disciplines on subsidies for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as disciplines on subsidies that lead to overcapacity and overfishing while introducing elements of transparency.

On the multilateral front, several proposals have been tabled on the issue including a joint proposal by New Zealand, Iceland and Pakistan; and a separate one from the European Union. In addition, two concept papers outlining the general positions of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group were circulated in earlier meetings.

The U.S. said it is currently consulting with its new leadership on the issue. However, their preliminary views are that no developing country should be exempted from disciplines. The U.S. said it supports the prohibition of subsidies to vessels engaged in IUU fishing, as well as prohibitions of subsidies that negatively affect fish stocks in overfished condition. The EU, meanwhile, called for any agreement on fisheries subsidies to be “fully subject” to dispute settlement. China for its part, opposed any proposals that will subject fishery management and territoriality to dispute settlement at the WTO, while Korea argued that the negotiations were not mature enough to start debating whether the result should be legally binding.

Even though countries involved in the FSA believe progress in one track does not preclude progress in the other, the true question remains how these two tracks really complement each other. Nevertheless, the issue is seen as a potential deliverable in Buenos Aires. There are concerns about expansive special and differential provisions and whether the accord should be legally binding and fully subject to dispute settlement, but other than that, there seems to be a genuine search for answers and a willingness to find solutions according to the chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules, Ambassador Wayne McCook of Jamaica.

Members look to meet twice in July where revised proposals and potential new proposals are expected to be circulated.

¹ SDG 14.6 calls for prohibiting certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminating subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and refraining from introducing new such subsidies, by 2020. Goal 14.6 also recognizes that appropriate and effective special and differential (S&D) treatment for developing and least developed members should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations.

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada and Canadian Hatching Egg Producers to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, particularly on the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

For more information or comments, please visit: dairyfarmers.ca, chickenfarmers.ca, eggfarmers.ca, turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca, chep-poic.ca

Legal Deposit: National Library of Canada, ISSN 1496-9254

