



**AD HOC EXPERT MEETING ON
TRADE IN SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES**

Geneva, 29 Sept-1 Oct 2015

INTERVENTION

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Commentary: Trade policy negotiations should contribute to sustainable fisheries

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Remarks issued during the Commonwealth-UNCTAD Expert Group Meeting on Trade in Sustainable Fisheries, 29 September-1 October 2015

Many of our Commonwealth member states are small island developing states (SIDS) - 25 out of a total membership of 53 countries - and oceans and their evolution are central to their socio-economic development. Many have jurisdiction over significant ocean areas that far, far exceed the land area of the countries themselves.

For example, the exclusive economic zone of The Bahamas covers an area that is 50 times larger than its land territory. Similar characteristics prevail throughout the Commonwealth – in St Vincent and the Grenadines and St Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean, in Seychelles and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, and in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu in the Pacific.

For all of these Commonwealth member countries, the management of such expansive areas of ocean space and the creation of an ocean economy creates many challenges. The management of fisheries forms an integral element of this challenge for many of our members and is integral to their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

The global ocean market is estimated to be valued at approximately US\$1,345 billion per annum, contributing approximately two per cent to the world's gross domestic product. Approximately 350 million jobs globally are linked to the use of ocean space and resources through fishing, aquaculture, coastal and marine tourism, shipping and research activity. In excess of one billion people depend on fish as their primary source of protein.

The increased reliance on the oceans coupled with mismanagement of ocean resources is placing the oceans under enormous pressure, with implications for humanity that we are only now beginning to fully appreciate.

We have known for some time that global fish stocks are over-exploited and that many fisheries are in a parlous state. The seriousness of the situation was highlighted in figures released only this month in the *Living Blue Planet Report*, which revealed for the first time that there has been a 50 per cent reduction in utilised fish stocks globally between 1970 and 2010. For fish stocks of particular importance to regional economies and livelihoods, the decline may be even more dramatic. This trend is echoed in the status of marine biodiversity generally.

This illustrates very clearly that there is an urgent need to better manage our ocean space and to focus more on the conservation and rebuilding of global fish stocks. Whilst a series of national, regional and multilateral efforts have been undertaken over the past two decades to address fish stock depletion with some success, much

more work remains to be done to improve marine species conservation and the protection of related ecosystems.

This year, I highlighted the need for a collective effort to establish a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable future for all of humanity. This collective effort is equally pertinent as we look for feasible approaches and frameworks to ensure that multilateral and regional trade policy negotiations can, and should, contribute to.

As we all know, 2015 is a significant year for the international community. Last weekend world leaders adopted the Sustainable Development Goals ('SDGs'), which replace the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs include a specific goal on our oceans (Goal 14), which urges the international community to take action to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

The level of ambition within the SDGs is commendable, and there are hopes that they may reinvigorate and build momentum at the multilateral level. However, the question of how to balance sustainable development and conservation remains, as does the challenge of translating the SDG goals into practical action by WTO members within the existing framework of multilateral trade rules.

The main difference between multilateral, regional and bilateral trade negotiations often boils down to the level of ambition in terms of the rule-setting. The speed at which bilateral and regional trade negotiations have been concluded relative to the respective rounds of negotiations under the multilateral trading system and the WTO are testimony to this. For example, 14 years of fisheries subsidies negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda have not yet produced an outcome. The Bali package agreed at the 9th WTO Ministerial is a pale reflection of what was originally envisaged in the Doha Development Agenda and round of negotiations, the first since the WTO inherited the multilateral trading system in 1995. In comparison, some 260 regional trade agreements have been notified to the WTO.

SDG Goal 14 builds upon many of the provisions for oceans and fisheries conservation contained in the Rio+20 outcome document, the Samoa Pathway and the Istanbul Programme of Action – an LDC-led initiative that expires in 2020. The focus on creating a coherent strategy for developing countries includes recognition of the need for special and differential treatment and technical co-operation (Goal 14.7) for SIDS and LDCs.

It will be important that WTO members' actions are consistent with these objectives and operate to promote rather than undermine efforts to manage global public goods and resources including in particular marine natural resources and fisheries.

Because of the level of ambition within the SDGs, some critics have said that implementation is likely to be difficult. The achievement of targets such as the end of overfishing and destructive fishing practices and the implementation of science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks by 2020 (Goal 14.4) will indeed be extremely difficult to achieve without coherent global action.

To conclude, multilateral and regional trade policy negotiations can and should

contribute to more sustainable fisheries. Aligning negotiation strategies in view of the stated objectives of the SDGs is important.

We certainly look forward to the outcomes of deliberation over the coming two days, and thank you again for this opportunity to share some thoughts on this important topic.