



NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISHWORKERS

PRESS RELEASE

World Trade Organisation (WTO) Fisheries Subsidy Negotiations on Over Capacity and Over Fishing [MC13, Abu Dhabi 26-29 February, 2024]

NPSSFW Raises Small Scale Fisheries Concerns

The National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers releases this press communique to convey and put on record the concerns of the small scale fish workers of India and the world regarding the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which is taking place at Abu Dhabi from 26th to 29th February, 2024.

1. NPSSFW stands and advocates for protection and promotion of socially and environmentally sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF).¹
2. NPSSFW vehemently objects **the non-participatory nature of WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies** that are being conducted without any space for the largest primary stakeholders in fisheries – the small-scale fish workers.
3. NPSSFW strongly holds that subsidies provided to the small-scale fisheries (SSF), are **instrumental to protect sustainable fishing, large employment, equitable distribution of income, food security and nutritional status of our society**. SSF is also key to addressing the issues arising from the urgency of the climate crisis. These subsidies may be both specific and non-specific to the SSF and may include both general and parametric insurances. With more than 50% of work force being women, the small-scale fisheries sector has also to be supported for gender balance in employment. As such **the provision of subsidies for SSF is non-negotiable**.
4. NPSSFW further holds that subsidies for Small Scale Fisheries in the developing or least developed countries is **beyond the mandate of WTO since these subsidies pertain to management of fisheries than to international trade**. These subsidies include not only the protection and promotion of sustainable small-scale fisheries, but also measures to convert

¹ NPSSFW defines Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) as fisheries where fishers and allied workers are directly engaged in the work in fisheries mainly for livelihood as against for commercial purpose. SSF by character is more traditional in its crafts and gears, more sustainable in its ecological footprint and more equitable in distribution of income. SSF needs to be designated by country/region following this common definition.



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unsustainable fishing gears and crafts to more sustainable ones, as well as to restore the ecological base of Small Scale Fisheries.

5. NPSSF stands by the principle that **Small-Scale or Large-Scale fisheries are to be designated not globally but by region or country**. Which is small-scale by size or capacity in developed countries, may be large-scale in developing or under-developed countries. It is vital therefore, to look beyond technical definitions of scale to the **social characteristics** of what comprises of small-scale fisheries. Based on this definition, NPSSF also rejects the limiting of SSF exemptions to territorial waters or contiguous zones based on the notion that these are the only waters in which SSF operate. Regionally and nationally, based on the ecological specificity of the fishery and available capacity, SSF can extend well into the EEZ and beyond.
6. NPSSF rejects treating fisheries subsidies by country and not by the sectoral categories like small-scale / large-scale, sustainable / unsustainable. Thus, NPSSF rejects the instructions to stop subsidies to the SSF of a given country on grounds of over-capacity or over-fishing, assuming that all the fishing sectors of that country are equally responsible. Instead, **subsidies to the large-scale and unsustainable sectors of the country needs to be stopped or restricted** using the principle of scale subsidiarity.
7. NPSSF, in the same vein, holds that **the nature and quantum of subsidies provided by a country should be considered not only by subsidies provided per capita of the workers involved in fisheries of that country, but more importantly, by subsidies provided to the small scale fisheries sector of that country**.
8. NPSSF maintains that **catch within the MSY (maximum sustainable yield) limits should not allow any country to subsidise destructive fishing gears or large-scale fisheries** that are responsible for destruction of the natural resource base and/or marginalization of small-scale fisheries. Social sustainability is a key component of ecological sustainability, and NPSSF rejects any agreement that only focusses on the **MSY** parameters.
9. Based on the principles of social and ecological sustainability, NPSSF rejects the attempts of some countries to protect their large-scale and unsustainable fisheries that are responsible for destructive fishing and over-

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capacity or over-fishing **on the pretext that their fishing gears are smaller in capacity compared to those of the countries that lead in industrial fishing.**

10. NPSSF supports the right of developing and under-developed nations to **claim their legitimate share in deep-sea fishing and/or their right to negotiate with other countries for sustainable harvesting of their fish resources** in conformity with the principles outlined above.
11. NPSSF maintains that the restoration, protection and promotion of sustainable and small scale fisheries all over the world should be undertaken through the principles of **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)** whereby the nations responsible for depleting the world's fisheries should pay for reparations.
12. NPSSF further holds that **the traditional livelihood rights of small-scale fisher people cannot be denied on the pretext of IUU (illegal, unregulated and unreported) fishing** and it is the responsibility of the concerned government to provide a legal, regulatory and reporting framework to protect the traditional and livelihood rights in small-scale fisheries.
13. NPSSF urges the governments, including the Government of India, to **stop all subsidies to the large-scale mechanized fishing sectors** responsible for overfishing and destructive fishing and not to accede to any agreement that goes against the interests of the small-scale fisheries.
14. In view of the present non-participatory and pro large-scale fisheries nature of the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies NPSSF calls upon the small-scale fish workers of the world and their organisations to unite and raise their voice to – **Save Water, Save Fish, Save Fisher People.**

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