



## **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF) National Conference 2022**

### **Resolution on WTO Fisheries Subsidy Negotiations and Agreement**

Fisheries Subsidies have been a major point of issue in the negotiations going on in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). WTO advocates free trade and are trying to negotiate withdrawal of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to free trade. It is obvious that in today's situation where countries and business houses are unequal in their trading capabilities free trade favours the more powerful players.

Fisheries subsidies are considered as non-tariff barriers to free trade. In the international scenario the countries indulging in large scale industrial fishing, that are responsible for depletion of fish resources in world's major fishing areas, provide huge subsidies to their fishing fleet. They are doggedly refusing to stop such subsidies stating that their subsidies are not harmful to marine natural fish resources. This has been a major point of conflict between the industrial fishing countries and other countries like India.

But both the industrial fishing countries and countries like India have a common point in their policy on fisheries subsidies. Both kinds of countries mostly subsidise their mechanised fishing fleet which are responsible for overfishing and destructive fishing in their respective fishing areas. This not only robs the small scale fishers of their catch but also destroys the natural fish resources by subsidising unsustainable fishing practices.

The Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon by the world community directs stoppage of subsidies to overfishing and destructive fishing. In this both the industrial fishing countries and countries like India agreed but refused to discontinue their prevailing subsidy regimes. The product has been disastrous. The agreement reached allowed both kinds of countries to continue with their subsidy regimes for two (actually four, because the agreement is to take two years to be ratified) more years. It means that for four more years the small scale fisher will be witnessing their fish resources to be looted away by the mechanised fishing fleet. Though there are provisions for providing subsidies for sustainable fishing and rebuilding of stock, there is no clear direction on the same and these matters are left to the states to determine and execute.

NPSSF also questions the authority of WTO in negotiating fisheries subsidies because fisheries subsidies may be used as a management tool in fisheries and WTO's mandate does not authorise it to meddle in the management of fisheries.

**The National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF) cannot accept the current agreement on fisheries subsidies reached in the WTO Ministerial Negotiations at Geneva from 12th to 15th June 2022 as it is unbalanced and unfair to small scale fishers and states that –**

1. NPSSF supports the government's position to fight for more subsidies but with a clear policy direction on where these need to be implemented. Such subsidies could help to rebuild stocks and include schemes like buy-back of trawlers and other vessels or devices, seasonal support with fishing ban periods, improvement in landing and vending facilities to enhance catch value to SSF etc.

2. The presence of subsidies to industrial fleets reduces the price of fish, concentrates fishing in the hands of few players and deprives the development scope of domestic fisheries, all of which is detrimental to SSF. We urge the government to strongly negotiate for disciplines on subsidies to large scale fishing, in particular industrial fishing fleets.

3. We ask the government to continue to negotiate the comprehensive agreement and not ratify the current agreement until there is an outcome that disciplines subsidies to large-scale fishing activities that overfish and destroy marine resources; and, only if they can ensure preferential or favourable treatment regarding subsidies for small scale sustainable fisheries.

**This is an agreement through which the plunderers of the marine fish resources will continue to be subsidized at the cost of the livelihood of small scale fishers. Small scale fishing communities of the world should unite to fight the WTO.**

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*Dt. November 9, 2022*