

FISHERIES SUBSIDIES AND GLOBAL POLICY REFORM UNDER THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO)

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1. Background

Marine fisheries are a vital component of global food systems and coastal economies. Millions of people rely on fisheries for employment, income generation, and nutritional security, particularly in developing countries where coastal communities depend heavily on marine resources for their livelihoods. In order to support the growth of the fisheries sector, many governments have historically provided financial assistance through various subsidy mechanisms. These measures often include support for fuel, vessel construction, fishing equipment, and operational expenses. While such subsidies have been introduced with the intention of improving economic productivity and fisher welfare, concerns have increasingly emerged regarding their unintended consequences. In particular, certain forms of financial support may contribute to increased fishing capacity and intensified exploitation of marine resources, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of global fisheries.

2. Introduction

Recognizing these concerns, the regulation of fisheries subsidies has become an important topic within international policy discussions, particularly under the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO has engaged member countries in negotiations aimed at addressing subsidy practices that may encourage unsustainable fishing activities or distort international seafood trade. These discussions focus on identifying and regulating subsidies that contribute to overfishing, excessive fishing capacity, and illegal fishing operations, while ensuring that support measures benefiting small-scale fishers and coastal communities are not adversely affected. In this context, international policy efforts seek to balance environmental sustainability, fair trade practices, and socio-economic considerations in the fisheries sector.

3. Key Objectives of Regulating Fisheries Subsidies

3.1. Prevention of Overfishing

The regulation of fisheries subsidies has become a significant issue in global fisheries governance, particularly within the framework of the WTO. One of the primary concerns addressed in international negotiations is the role of certain subsidies in contributing to overfishing and the depletion of marine fisheries resources. Government support in the form of fuel subsidies, financial assistance for vessel construction, modernization of fishing gear, and operational cost support can increase fishing capacity and reduce the operational costs of fishing activities. While such support may initially aim to improve the livelihoods of fishing communities and enhance production, it can also enable fishing fleets to continue operating even when fish stocks are declining. As a result, fishing effort may exceed the natural regenerative capacity of marine ecosystems, leading to the overexploitation of fish stocks. Consequently, international policy discussions increasingly emphasize the need to regulate or eliminate subsidies that contribute to excessive fishing pressure while promoting sustainable fisheries management and responsible resource use (WTO, 2022; FAO, 2020).

3.2. Protection of Marine Ecosystems

The protection of marine ecosystems has become a central concern in global fisheries governance, particularly in discussions related to fisheries subsidies. Subsidies that support large-scale industrial fishing, such as financial assistance for fuel, vessel expansion, and advanced fishing technologies, can increase fishing intensity and contribute to ecological imbalance in marine environments. Excessive fishing pressure can disrupt fish population structures, alter marine food chains, and damage sensitive habitats such as coral reefs and seabed ecosystems. When fish stocks are harvested faster than their natural capacity to regenerate, the ecological stability of marine ecosystems becomes threatened.

International organizations such as the FAO have repeatedly emphasized that unsustainable fishing practices pose significant risks to the long-term health and productivity of the world's oceans. Consequently, efforts to reduce or regulate harmful fisheries subsidies are increasingly viewed as an important step toward promoting sustainable fisheries management, conserving marine biodiversity, and ensuring the long-term availability of marine resources for future generations (FAO, 2020; WTO, 2022).

3.3. Addressing Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (IUU)

Addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing has become a critical objective in international fisheries governance. IUU fishing refers to fishing activities that violate national laws, occur without proper reporting, or take place in areas where regulatory frameworks are absent or poorly enforced. In some cases, government subsidies such as financial assistance for fuel, vessel operation, or fishing equipment may indirectly support vessels engaged in such illegal practices, thereby enabling them to continue fishing despite regulatory restrictions. Recognizing this challenge, international policy frameworks increasingly emphasize the need to eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing.

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies includes provisions that prohibit governments from granting subsidies to vessels or operators identified as participating in illegal fishing activities. These measures aim to strengthen global fisheries governance, improve compliance with conservation regulations, and support sustainable management of marine resources (WTO, 2022; FAO, 2001).

3.4. Reducing Excess Fishing Capacity

Reducing excessive fishing capacity is another important objective in global fisheries policy discussions. In many countries, government subsidies aimed at supporting the fisheries sector have unintentionally contributed to the expansion of fishing fleets beyond the sustainable limits of marine resources. Financial assistance for vessel construction, engine modernization, and advanced fishing gear can significantly increase the capacity and efficiency of fishing operations. While these subsidies may initially aim to enhance production and improve fisher livelihoods, they can lead to a situation where too many vessels compete for limited fish stocks.

This imbalance between fishing capacity and the natural productivity of marine ecosystems intensifies fishing pressure and accelerates the depletion of fish populations. Recognizing this challenge, international organizations such as the FAO of the United Nations and the WTO emphasize the need to regulate subsidies that contribute to excessive fishing capacity. Limiting

such subsidies is considered an important step toward restoring balance between fishing effort and the sustainable availability of marine resources (FAO, 2020; WTO, 2022).

3.5. Ensuring Fair International Trade

Ensuring fair competition in international fisheries trade is another important reason for regulating fisheries subsidies. Subsidies provided by governments—such as financial support for fuel, vessel modernization, and operational costs can significantly reduce the production expenses of fishing fleets. Countries that provide substantial subsidies to their fishing industries may gain a competitive advantage in global seafood markets, as their fleets can operate at lower costs and supply fish products at more competitive prices. This situation can create unequal conditions in international trade, particularly disadvantaging fishers and producers from countries that provide limited or no subsidies. Recognizing these trade distortions, the WTO has taken up the issue of fisheries subsidies as part of its broader efforts to promote fair and transparent global trade practices. By regulating subsidies that distort market competition, international agreements aim to create a more balanced trading environment while encouraging sustainable fisheries management (WTO, 2022; FAO, 2020).

3.6. Long-Term Sustainability of Fisheries

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of fisheries is a central objective of international efforts to reform harmful fisheries subsidies. Excessive fishing pressure, often supported by certain types of government subsidies, can accelerate the depletion of fish stocks and threaten the long-term productivity of marine resources. When fish populations decline beyond sustainable levels, the consequences extend beyond environmental damage to include serious socio-economic impacts. Fishers may lose their primary source of income, coastal economies dependent on fisheries may face economic instability, and the availability of fish as an important source of nutrition may decline, thereby affecting food security.

Recognizing these risks, international policy discussions emphasize the need to reform subsidies that contribute to unsustainable fishing practices. Organizations such as the FAO and the WTO highlight that responsible subsidy policies can help maintain a balance between economic development and ecological conservation, ensuring that fisheries remain both economically viable and environmentally sustainable for future generations (FAO, 2020; WTO, 2022).

3.7. Alignment with Global Sustainable Development Goals

Reforming fisheries subsidies is closely linked to global commitments for sustainable development, particularly the objectives outlined in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water). SDG 14 emphasizes the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources, recognizing the critical role that healthy marine ecosystems play in supporting livelihoods, food security, and biodiversity.

One of the key targets under this goal calls for the prohibition or reform of harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. By addressing subsidies that encourage excessive fishing effort, international initiatives aim to reduce pressure on marine resources and promote responsible fishing practices. In this context, global policy discussions, including those within the WTO, seek to align fisheries subsidy regulations with broader sustainable development objectives. These efforts aim to ensure that fisheries management

practices support both conservation and the long-term economic stability of fishing communities (United Nations, 2015; FAO, 2020).

Before implementing any policy measures, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the sector to which such policies are applied. Sector-specific knowledge is particularly important in fisheries, where livelihoods, ecological systems, and market dynamics are closely interconnected. Globally, several policy debates are taking place regarding the need to eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies and reduce financial support that may contribute to overfishing. These discussions are especially prominent in international negotiations under the framework of the World Trade Organization, where member countries are working toward regulating fisheries subsidies that may negatively affect marine resources. While such initiatives are important for promoting sustainable fisheries, there is also a growing concern that insufficient attention is being given to developing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the fisheries sector itself.

Unlike many other economic sectors, fisheries involve complex relationships between natural resources, coastal communities, traditional livelihoods, and food security. Policies that focus primarily on reducing or limiting support mechanisms without adequately recognizing these sectoral characteristics may unintentionally create economic and social challenges for fishing communities. Therefore, policy approaches addressing fisheries sustainability must carefully consider the broader socio-economic realities of the sector while ensuring the responsible management and conservation of marine resources.

This paper, therefore, aims to explain how the fisheries sector differs from other economic sectors and emphasizes the need to give appropriate priority to fisheries when designing policies related to subsidies, sustainability, and livelihood protection.

4. Distinct Nature of the Fisheries Sector and the Need for Policy Priority

In global policy discussions, particularly those concerning the reform of fisheries subsidies, significant attention has been given to reducing financial support that may contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. While such initiatives are important for protecting marine fisheries resources, policy reforms must be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the fisheries sector and the unique conditions under which fishing communities operate. Without such sector-specific understanding, policy interventions may unintentionally overlook the operational realities, risks, and socio-economic vulnerabilities associated with fishing livelihoods.

Fishing is widely recognized as one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Unlike most livelihoods, fishing is a occupation in the aquatic environment carried out in unpredictable and often hostile marine environments. Fishers are exposed to numerous risks, including rough seas, storms, vessel accidents, fatigue, mechanical failures, and long periods away from shore. According to the FAO, fishing has historically been identified as one of the most hazardous professions globally due to the high incidence of occupational accidents and fatalities (FAO, 2020). These risks distinguish fisheries from most other economic activities and require specialized safety systems, institutional support, and governance mechanisms.

For analytical clarity, fisheries are often compared with agriculture because both sectors are primary livelihood activities that contribute significantly to food security and rural employment. However, this comparison is not intended to undermine the importance of

agriculture. Rather, it highlights the fundamental differences between land-based and sea-based occupations. Agriculture operates primarily within defined land boundaries with relatively predictable seasonal cycles and well-established institutional support systems such as extension services, crop insurance, and storage infrastructure. Fisheries, in contrast, operate within dynamic marine ecosystems characterized by fluctuating fish stocks, uncertain weather conditions, maritime boundaries, and international ocean governance frameworks.

The fisheries sector requires specialized knowledge and operational capabilities that are distinct from those associated with land-based occupations. Fishing activities involve knowledge of navigation, vessel operation, weather forecasting, marine ecology, fishing gear technology, onboard safety systems, and post-harvest handling of a highly perishable fish catch in extreme weather conditions. Fishers must also navigate complex regulatory frameworks, including maritime laws, fishing zones, conservation regulations, and international fisheries governance mechanisms. These operational characteristics highlight the need for policies that recognize the unique nature of fisheries rather than treating it simply as an extension of agriculture.

Despite these significant differences, fisheries in many countries continue to be administratively grouped within ministries primarily focused on agriculture. While agriculture remains a vital sector deserving strong policy support, its institutional dominance within shared ministry frameworks often results in fisheries receiving comparatively less attention in policy formulation, budget allocation, and institutional development. This structural arrangement can limit the development of fisheries-specific programmes addressing fisher safety, marine resource sustainability, and coastal livelihood security. A further institutional challenge arises from the professional background of many senior decision-makers responsible for designing and implementing fisheries policies. In several cases, administrative leadership positions are held by professionals trained primarily in agriculture or forestry. Although these individuals possess valuable expertise in their respective disciplines, they may have limited exposure to the operational realities of fisheries. Issues such as vessel-based livelihoods, marine safety risks, international fisheries regulations, coastal socio-economic dynamics, and ocean ecosystem management require specialized understanding that differs substantially from land-based resource management.

This knowledge gap can become particularly visible in the design and implementation of fisheries development schemes. Even when advisory committees include fisheries experts, final policy decisions may be shaped by administrative perspectives that do not fully reflect the ground realities of fishing communities. As a result, programmes may underestimate the capital requirements for fishing vessels and gear, overlook safety infrastructure, inadequately address post-harvest challenges, or fail to strengthen fisheries value chains and market access. Such misalignment between policy design and operational realities can reduce the effectiveness of development interventions and weaken the intended benefits for fishing communities.

The structural limitations affecting fisheries governance are not confined to national systems alone. At the global level, the FAO plays a central role in shaping international advisory frameworks, technical guidelines, and policy recommendations for fisheries management. These frameworks often influence how member countries structure their ministries, design fisheries policies, and implement development programmes. However, fisheries have historically been positioned within a broader agriculture-oriented institutional framework. While this arrangement has facilitated administrative coordination, it has also contributed to the persistence of agriculture-dominated policy approaches in many countries.

Given the growing challenges of climate change, marine ecosystem degradation, fisher safety concerns, and complex international fisheries governance systems, the traditional approach of subsuming fisheries under agriculture-led policy structures may no longer be adequate. Fisheries operate within maritime environments that require specialized institutional arrangements, technical expertise, and governance systems tailored to the realities of ocean-based livelihoods. Another important dimension relates to the increasing involvement of national and international conservation organizations in marine resource management. Conservation initiatives play a vital role in protecting marine ecosystems and ensuring long-term sustainability. However, some conservation programmes have been criticized for being designed without sufficient understanding of country-specific socio-economic contexts or the livelihood realities of fishing communities. In certain situations, regulatory frameworks introduced for conservation purposes may unintentionally place disproportionate burdens on fishers whose daily survival depends on marine resources.

Unlike land-based sectors where boundaries, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms are often clearly defined, marine spaces are fluid and complex. Fishers may unintentionally violate regulations due to unclear maritime boundaries, rapidly changing ecological conditions, or insufficient communication of regulatory requirements. In such circumstances, fishers engaged in legitimate livelihood activities may sometimes be treated as violators rather than stakeholders in marine resource stewardship. These challenges highlight the need for participatory and context-sensitive governance frameworks that balance conservation objectives with livelihood security. Fishing livelihoods are also characterized by unique economic vulnerabilities. Unlike agricultural produce or manufactured goods, fish is highly perishable and requires immediate handling, cold storage, and efficient marketing systems. In many coastal regions, adequate infrastructure such as ice plants, cold storage facilities, and processing units remains limited. Consequently, fishers are often compelled to sell their catch immediately after landing, frequently at prices determined by intermediaries. This exposes fishing communities to price volatility and market exploitation.

Furthermore, fishers often operate outside formal employment structures and therefore lack access to many social protection mechanisms available to workers in organized sectors. Unlike salaried employees who benefit from pensions, provident funds, health insurance, and paid leave, fishers generally rely on uncertain income based on catch availability, weather conditions, fuel costs, and market prices. Even temporary disruptions caused by storms, mechanical failures, or conservation-related fishing bans can lead to severe income losses. Recognizing fisheries as a distinct sector is therefore not merely an administrative adjustment but a necessary step toward ensuring effective governance, occupational safety, and sustainable resource management. A stronger institutional framework for fisheries would allow governments to design policies specifically addressing marine safety, fisher welfare, sustainable harvesting, post-harvest infrastructure, and equitable market access.

The FAO has a critical role to play in guiding this transformation. By acknowledging fisheries as a distinct aquatic sector with unique governance requirements, FAO can encourage member countries to adopt institutional arrangements that better reflect the realities of fisheries management. This could include establishing independent ministries for fisheries or creating autonomous governance frameworks staffed by professionals with expertise in marine science, fisheries economics, maritime safety, and coastal community development. FAO can further strengthen this process by facilitating global and regional consultations involving fisher organizations, marine scientists, safety experts, labour specialists, and policy practitioners with field experience. Such participatory dialogue would help develop policy recommendations that

are sensitive to national contexts while promoting responsible fisheries governance. Through evidence-based advisory frameworks and inclusive consultation processes, FAO can contribute significantly to correcting long-standing institutional imbalances and ensuring that fisheries receive the focused attention, policy priority, and governance structures necessary for sustainable and equitable development.

Ultimately, recognizing the distinct nature of fisheries is essential for achieving balanced policy outcomes that simultaneously support marine conservation, fisher safety, and livelihood security. Fisheries and agriculture are both vital pillars of global food systems. However, acknowledging their operational differences and governance needs will enable more effective policy design and ensure that fishing communities receive the institutional support necessary to sustain their livelihoods in an increasingly complex and uncertain marine environment.

5. Governance, Responsibility, and Fisheries Management Framework in India

India has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework for fisheries conservation and management, clearly demonstrating that the primary responsibility for sustainability, monitoring, regulation, and enforcement rests with government authorities rather than with individual fishers. Several legislative instruments and policy frameworks guide fisheries governance in the country, including the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976, the Rules for Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the EEZ, 2025, the Guidelines for Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the High Seas by Indian Flagged Fishing Vessels, 2025, the National Marine Fisheries Policy, 2017, the network of State-level Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (MFRAs), and the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, which regulates coastal development activities to protect fragile coastal ecosystems and sustain the livelihoods of fishing communities.

For strengthening marine conservation, several species of marine species are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Under this legislation, the capture, possession, and trade of selected species, including certain sharks, sea cucumbers, marine turtles, and other ecologically sensitive marine organisms, are strictly prohibited or regulated. These provisions demonstrate that marine biodiversity conservation in India extends beyond fisheries-specific legislation and is reinforced through broader environmental protection laws. The conservation and sustainable use of marine biological resources are also supported by the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, which establishes institutional mechanisms such as the National Biodiversity Authority, State Biodiversity Boards, and local Biodiversity Management Committees. This legislation promotes conservation, sustainable utilization of biological resources, and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use, including marine biodiversity resources that are closely linked to fisheries ecosystems.

Together, these legal instruments and policy frameworks empower Union and State governments to regulate fishing activities, conserve marine biodiversity, and ensure sustainable utilization of fisheries resources. Governments have implemented a wide range of regulatory and conservation measures, including seasonal fishing bans (commonly known as monsoon bans), mesh size regulations designed to prevent juvenile fish catch, vessel licensing and registration systems, zoning provisions to protect traditional fishing grounds, and the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and no-take zones. Technological safeguards such as turtle excluder devices (TEDs) have also been promoted to minimize the incidental capture of protected marine species. In recent years, fisheries governance in India has increasingly incorporated participatory approaches through co-management arrangements that

involve fishworker organizations, local institutions, and fisheries departments in resource management and decision-making processes. These collaborative models help bridge the gap between policy design and local realities, improving compliance and promoting shared stewardship of marine resources.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate the existence of structured, government-led mechanisms for marine resource conservation and fisheries management. Fishworkers, fisheries departments, and other stakeholders operate within this regulatory framework and increasingly collaborate to achieve sustainability objectives. This cooperative approach represents a constructive institutional feature, reflecting shared responsibility for safeguarding both marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods. Sustainability outcomes therefore depend primarily on public policy design, enforcement capacity, and effective institutional coordination, rather than on the actions of individual small-scale and artisanal fishers alone.

Fishing remains a vital source of livelihood for millions of people in India. It is estimated that nearly 2.5 million individuals depend directly or indirectly on marine fisheries for employment and income, with women constituting approximately 44 percent of the workforce across harvesting, processing, marketing, and post-harvest activities. Any fisheries-related trade or subsidy discipline under WTO negotiations particularly in discussions related to Fish 1 and Fish 2 must therefore strike a careful balance between environmental sustainability, livelihood security, social equity, and development needs.

The Federation of Indian Fisher Organizations (FIFO) strongly advocates for a development-oriented and fisher-centric fisheries subsidies framework within the WTO. Such a framework should be aligned with international guidance such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication and the broader commitments of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water). A balanced framework must recognize differentiated responsibilities among countries, respect national governance systems and constitutional arrangements, and ensure that sustainability objectives are pursued without compromising the dignity, livelihoods, and rights of fishing communities. Strengthening governance, supporting responsible and sustainable fishing practices, and protecting fisher livelihoods must therefore be viewed as complementary goals rather than competing priorities in global fisheries policy discussions.

6. Governance Recognition in Global Fisheries Subsidy Disciplines

In countries where extensive regulatory frameworks, conservation measures, and institutional governance mechanisms already exist, national systems play a central role in achieving fisheries sustainability. Governments that have established comprehensive monitoring, licensing, conservation, and enforcement mechanisms demonstrate their commitment to responsible fisheries management through public policy and institutional oversight. In such contexts, sustainability outcomes should be assessed not merely through the presence or absence of subsidies but through the effectiveness of governance frameworks that regulate fishing activities and protect marine ecosystems. The responsibility for ensuring sustainable fisheries therefore lies primarily with governments through their laws, regulatory agencies, and conservation policies.

7. Fish 1 and Fish 2 Negotiations

The negotiations on fisheries subsidies at the WTO have progressed in two stages. The first stage resulted in the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies adopted during the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference, commonly referred to as Fish 1, which focuses primarily on prohibiting subsidies linked to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and fishing in unregulated areas of the high seas. The second stage of negotiations, often referred to as Fish 2, continues to address the more complex issue of subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing. From the perspective of fishing communities represented by FIFO, it is important that these negotiations balance environmental sustainability with livelihood security, development priorities, and governance realities in developing countries. The following table provides a comparative overview of Fish 1 and Fish 2 negotiations, highlighting FIFO's perspective and its alignment with India's negotiating approach.

Comparative Table: Fish 1 vs Fish 2 – FIFO Position

Aspect	Fish 1-Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (Adopted, MC12)	Fish 2-Ongoing Negotiations (Overcapacity & Overfishing)
WTO Status	Adopted in June 2022 at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference; entered into force on 15 Sept 2025	Under negotiation; focuses on additional disciplines related to overcapacity and overfishing
Primary Objective	Eliminate subsidies contributing to IUU fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and fishing in unregulated high seas	Discipline subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing while preserving development policy space
FIFO Position (Overall)	Supports environmental objectives but calls for fair, contextual, and targeted implementation	Advocates strong development safeguards, policy flexibility, and protection of small-scale fisheries
Alignment with India's Position	Agreement acceptable only with recognition of governance realities, capacity limitations, and data gaps	India stresses development priorities, livelihood protection, and the historical responsibility of developed members
IUU Fishing Subsidies	Subsidy prohibition should not penalize fishers for regulatory or enforcement failures beyond their control	Any linkage to IUU must avoid indirect restrictions on livelihood-oriented support
Overfished Stocks	Requires scientific, transparent, and state-specific stock assessments	FIFO supports management-based approaches rather than blanket subsidy bans
Unregulated High Seas Fishing	Relevant primarily to large distant-water fleets; limited relevance to Indian small-scale fisheries	Should not be used to restrict domestic or near-shore fisheries support
Overcapacity & Overfishing	Not directly addressed	Must distinguish between capacity-enhancing subsidies and livelihood or safety-related support
Fuel Subsidies	Outside the scope	FIFO is not in favour of blanket restrictions on fuel support, as such assistance is often essential

		for sustaining livelihoods and ensuring the safety of fishing operations.
Vessel Construction & Modernization	Outside the scope	Support for safety upgrades, energy efficiency, and the replacement of unsafe vessels must be permitted
Small-Scale & Artisanal Fisheries	Must be explicitly protected through SDT and implementation flexibility	Central to FIFO's position, small-scale fisheries should be carved out or positively recognized
Special & Differential Treatment (SDT)	Essential for implementation and compliance	Non-negotiable; FIFO fully aligns with India's demand for effective, not merely symbolic SDT
Developing Country Policy Space	Recognizes development constraints but with compliance obligations	Requires longer transition periods and self-determined development policies
Transparency & Notification Requirements	Members must notify fisheries subsidies, vessel data, and management measures to the WTO	Additional transparency obligations under negotiation
Capacity Building & Technical Assistance	Agreement establishes a voluntary funding mechanism to support developing members' implementation	Continued financial and technical support is needed for fisheries data, monitoring, and governance
State-Level Governance (India-specific)	Fisheries management and enforcement largely implemented by Indian States through Marine Fishing Regulation Acts	Future rules must accommodate India's federal governance structure
Livelihood & Employment Impact	Risks exist if implemented without safeguards	High risk if poorly designed; affects 2.5 million fishers and fishworkers, 44% women
Sustainability Approach	Supports sustainability through regulatory compliance and prohibition of harmful subsidies	Sustainability should be pursued through fisheries management, not trade restrictions alone
Link to SDGs	Directly linked to SDG 14.6 (eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies) under the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda	Supports broader SDGs including SDG 2, SDG 8, SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 14
FIFO's Core Message	Implementation must respect governance realities and avoid penalizing small-scale fishers	Negotiations must produce a development-centred outcome that protects livelihoods and food security
Marine Products Promotion & Traceability	Fisheries governance in India increasingly integrates sustainability certification, export traceability, and quality assurance systems supported by the Marine Products Export Development Authority	Future disciplines should recognize that traceability systems, export promotion, and value-chain improvements support responsible fisheries and fisher livelihoods rather than contributing to overcapacity

8. Conclusion

The comparison above illustrates that while the first phase of negotiations at the World Trade Organization addressed specific categories of harmful subsidies, the ongoing discussions under Fish 2 involve far more complex questions related to development policy space, livelihood security, and the structural differences between industrial and small-scale fishing. For countries such as India, where fisheries provide employment and food security to millions of coastal households, subsidy disciplines must remain balanced, equitable, and development-oriented.

At the same time, fisheries conservation, regulation, and management are primarily the responsibility of the national government. India has established a comprehensive governance framework consisting of policies, laws, regulatory measures, and monitoring systems designed to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources. These include national policies, state-level fisheries regulations, conservation measures, and institutional mechanisms that guide fishing activities and resource management. The responsibility for ensuring sustainability, therefore rests with the State through its governance systems, regulatory authorities, and enforcement mechanisms.

India is also strengthening responsible fisheries through improvements in value chains, export governance, and product traceability. Industry stakeholders such as the Seafood Exporters Association of India, the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation, and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers play important roles in promoting responsible sourcing, quality standards, and international market linkages for marine products. Working in coordination with government institutions such as the Marine Products Export Development Authority, these stakeholders contribute to improving traceability systems, certification mechanisms, and sustainable supply chains. Such initiatives not only enhance the global competitiveness of India's seafood sector but also support fishing communities by strengthening marine product exports, improving value realization, and ensuring that sustainability and market access go hand in hand.

Any future agreement must therefore recognize the distinct nature of small-scale and artisanal fisheries, the governance frameworks already established at national and state levels, and the broader socio-economic role of fisheries in coastal communities. A fair and sustainable outcome should strengthen marine conservation while simultaneously protecting the dignity, livelihoods, and food security of fishing communities.

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