

Good reasons to stop harmful fisheries subsidies

Press release, 16 February 2024



The World Trade Organization (WTO), based in Geneva, has been tasked with eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies for over 20 years. WTO members raise USD 22 billion annually in such harmful subsidies [1]. The leader by far is China. Japan is in second position followed by the EU with around two billion, including around 700 million for Spain.

The balance points towards a lack of sustainability, as the analysis of the dwindling biodiversity [2] and the declining amount of particularly popular wild marine catches shows [3]. The catch reconstructions of the Sea Around Us Initiative, which supplements FAO data with local sources, have shown an even clearer downward trend for years [4]. Consumers are experiencing this in the form of significantly increased fish prices. Catches in European waters are at their lowest levels in a long time, with more than 70% of consumption being imported. Subsidization finances overfishing by distant water fleets, especially in countries in the Global South such as Peru, Ecuador, Ghana, Mauritania and Senegal. Artisanal fishermen suffer particularly from this industrial competition, which massively affects local and regional value chains.

Ending harmful fishing subsidies would have many positive effects:

1. The overexploited resources could recover and enable greater sustainable yields, as calculated for European waters by an international research group led by Rainer Froese from GEOMAR in Kiel [5].
2. The fuel consumption of global industrial fleets, which measurably contributes to climate change, would be drastically reduced - a bonus for the climate.
3. The artisanal fishermen could make a living again, the women in processing and sales could feed their families and send their children to school. This would provide the economic stimulus in terms of jobs and sufficient local landings for viable ports along the coasts for climate-friendly regional production and consumption. The current damage is immense [6].

4. The fishing vessels that only make an operational profit thanks to the subsidies would be decommissioned or converted for other purposes that contribute positively to the national economy.

5. The general conversion of fisheries management to an ecosystem-based approach, also supported by effective protection zones, especially for spawning areas and juvenile fish, will strengthen productivity and resilience against the negative consequences of climate change.

The rapid implementation of the agreement to protect the high seas promises further opportunities to maintain and expand the potential of fish stocks as a carbon sink [7].

For all these reasons, Mundus maris strongly reiterates the demands of the broad civil society platform requesting the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the WTO in Abu Dhabi (February 26-29, 2024) to support an ambitious agreement. The harmful fishing subsidies must finally be terminated.

More information: C.E. Nauen (info@mundusmaris.org)

Mundus maris asbl: www.mundusmaris.org and social media FB, X, t, LinkedIn

[1] Sumaila, U.R., et al. (2019). Updated estimates and analysis of global fisheries subsidies. *Marine Policy*, 109:103695

[2] IPBES (2019). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. S. Díaz, J. Settele, E. S. Brondízio, H. T. Ngo, M. Guèze, J. Agard, A. Arneth, P. Balvanera, K. A. Brauman, S. H. M. Butchart, K. M. A. Chan, L. A. Garibaldi, K. Ichii, J. Liu, S. M. Subramanian, G. F. Midgley, P. Miloslavich, Z. Molnár, D. Obura, A. Pfaff, S. Polasky, A. Purvis, J. Razzaque, B. Reyers, R. Roy Chowdhury, Y. J. Shin, I. J. Visseren-Hamakers, K. J. Willis, and C. N. Zayas (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 56 pages. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579>

[3] FAO (2022). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022. Towards Blue Transformation. Rome, FAO <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0461en>

[4] www.seaaroundus.org

[5] Froese, R. et al. (2018). Status and rebuilding of European fisheries. *Marine Policy*, 93:159-190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2018.04.018>

[6] Gutierrez, M. et al. (2024). Fishy Business: estimating the impact of irregular and unsustainable fishing of distant-water fishing fleets in Ecuador, Ghana, Peru, the Philippines and Senegal. London, ODI, 156p. (<https://odi.org/en/publications/fishy-business>)

[7] Oostdijk, M. et al. (2022). Governing Open Ocean and Fish Carbon: Perspectives and Opportunities. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars>.