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Large-scale fleets should be target of fish subsidies talks, WTO hears

World Trade Organization (WTO) ambassadors, government officials and civil society representatives heard a range of perspectives on the importance of allowing for development in any further agreement on fisheries subsidies in the WTO. The WTO Public Forum session aimed to discuss both the existing Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the ongoing negotiations on subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

“This Public Forum event provided for WTO Members and those in attendance the opportunity to hear a variety of perspectives on the negotiations, including the reason to target large-scale fleets, the importance to protect small-scale fishers from losing vital subsidies, and the need to ensure that developing countries retain the ability to develop their fisheries,” commented Mr Adam Wolfenden, Co-Deputy Coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation, whom was a panellist. The panel presentation comes ahead of next weeks round of WTO negotiations on the prohibitions targeting subsidies for over-capacity and over fishing.

Mr Peter Lunenborg from the intergovernmental body South Centre, presented a detailed analysis of the central role that large-scale fleets have in not only catching the most fish but in receiving the majority of harmful subsidies and therefore should be the target of any outcome that aims to reduced subsidisation of fishing capacity.

On the other side of the issue of large-scale fishing is the importance of small-scale fishing to livelihoods and sustenance across many communities, and the need to protect them from losing vital government supports.

“The fisher-folks perspective about the importance of government support for the sector is to sustain their livelihoods as well as the types of subsidies, especially those relating to capacity that are needed for fishing” Alieu Sowe, Coordinator Gambia Fisher Folks Association.

PIFS Permanent Representative to the WTO, Ambassador Mere Falemaka, provided a perspective on the importance of Pacific fish stocks both within the region and globally. She further highlighted the need to ensure that any outcome on this issue does not lock the Pacific Island Countries out from being able to fish their own stocks.

“Developing countries, including Pacific WTO members, must not lose their right to develop and fish their own resources. This is key to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goal mandate for the negotiations but is at risk of being lost in the current direction of these ongoing talks” commented Mr Adam Wolfenden,

The panel was organised by the Pacific Network on Globalisation, Handelskampanjen, and the World Forum on Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers.

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