

# Fisheries sustainability top agenda at WTO meeting

Trade, Industry and Competition Minister, Ebrahim Patel, has called for the disciplining of subsidies targeted at large-scale industrial fishing while safeguarding food security and livelihoods for subsistence and artisanal fisheries.



Unsplash via [Pxabay](#)

The Minister on Tuesday participated in the Informal World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Ministers Meeting.

The meeting discussed ways to narrow differences and generate consensus to drive the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations towards a conclusion and the contribution of the WTO to global economic recovery post-Covid-19.

The negotiations on fisheries subsidies are at a critical stage and the WTO has a role to deliver on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.6, which aims to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing and eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The SDG also aims to refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognising that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation by 2020.

A study by the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 85% of governments' fisheries subsidies benefit large

industrial fleets, thereby creating perverse incentives that enable distant water fleets to target fishing stocks that are already in an unsustainable condition.

In relation to the contribution of the WTO to global economic recovery, Patel stressed that the prospects of economic recovery are dependent on an efficient response to curb the pandemic.

"Many countries face institutional and legal difficulties when using TRIPS [Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights] flexibilities due to the cumbersome process to be followed to invoke the flexibilities.

"The TRIPS Waiver, as proposed by South Africa and other developing countries, aims to promote timely, affordable and equitable access to vaccines, medical technologies and treatments of Covid-19, and ensure that IPRs [intellectual property rights] are protected for the benefit of all," said Patel.

This follows a call South Africa made at the G20 Ministers of Trade and Investment meeting on 23 July 2020.

At the meeting, Patel highlighted the need for the G20 and the World Trade Organisation to discuss the relationship between Trips and Covid-19, arguing that affordable access to technology to produce critical medical supplies remains important.

The South African government argued that the provisions of the Trips Agreement on patents and compulsory licensing should not be barriers to sharing the technology to produce the medical equipment needed to address the crisis.

"In a post-Covid dispensation, strong and resilient national systems would have to enhance national production capacities; ensure greater diversification and value-addition, including technological upgrading.

"This applies even more in circumstances where developed countries are adopting measures to promote 'strategic autonomy' and re-shoring strategies. We strongly believe that further tariff liberalisation is not a solution in the midst of a crisis," said Patel.

Furthermore, the Minister stressed that it is time for a fresh set of thinking about trade policy and its interface with industrial policies and legitimate national industrial objectives.

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