

# India Joins the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

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India has deposited its Instrument of Acceptance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS), becoming the 123rd WTO member to join the pact. The move aims to curb harmful fishing subsidies, promote sustainable use of marine resources and protect the livelihoods of India's traditional and small-scale fishers.

## About WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

The **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** was adopted by consensus at the **WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12)** in **Geneva** in June 2022 and entered into force on **15 September 2025** after receiving acceptance from two-thirds of WTO members.

- It is the first multilateral WTO agreement that specifically focuses on environmental sustainability.
- Its main objective is to stop government subsidies that encourage illegal fishing, overfishing and the excessive expansion of fishing fleets.

## Key Provisions of WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

## The **key provisions of WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** include:

- The Agreement on fisheries subsidies prohibits subsidies that support Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- It disciplines subsidies for fishing overfished stocks, subject to specified conditions.
- It targets harmful subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, particularly by large industrial and distant-water fishing fleets.
- It applies to marine wild-capture fishing and fishing-related activities at sea.
- Aquaculture and inland fisheries are excluded from the scope of the Agreement.
- The Agreement provides flexibilities for developing and least-developed countries while promoting sustainable fisheries management.

## **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies Need**

The global fisheries sector faces growing pressure from overfishing, depletion of marine resources and the expansion of heavily subsidised industrial fishing fleets.

- According to WTO estimates, **around 37.7% of global marine fish stocks are currently overfished**, compared with about 10% in 1974.
- Large-scale government subsidies, estimated at nearly **USD 35 billion annually**, have contributed to excessive fishing capacity and unsustainable exploitation of marine resources.

By disciplining harmful subsidies, the Agreement seeks to create a more equitable global fisheries regime and promote the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

## **Significance for India**

The Agreement is important for India because its fisheries sector is largely based on traditional and small-scale fishing rather than heavily subsidised industrial fishing.

- It can help protect the livelihoods, employment and food security of India's traditional and small-scale fishing communities.
- It can reduce the unfair advantage enjoyed by large industrial fleets that receive substantial government support.
- It promotes the conservation and sustainable use of India's marine fisheries resources.
- It can improve India's credibility in global seafood markets where sustainability and traceability are becoming increasingly important.
- It strengthens India's commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system.

A major advantage for India is that aquaculture is outside the scope of the Agreement. India is a major producer and exporter of aquaculture-based shrimp. Since such activities are not covered by the Agreement, India's shrimp export sector will not face direct restrictions under the AFS.

Thus, India can support sustainable marine fishing while continuing to maintain the competitiveness of its important aquaculture-based seafood export sector.

## India's Domestic Preparedness

India already has several measures that support the objectives of the Agreement.

- The **Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Rules, 2025** provide a framework for the sustainable management of fisheries resources within India's maritime zones.
- The **Guidelines for Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the High Seas** by Indian-Flagged Fishing Vessels, 2025 promote responsible fishing practices by Indian vessels operating in international waters.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** supports fisheries infrastructure, sustainable development, livelihood improvement and capacity building.

These measures provide a foundation for India to implement its international commitments while protecting the interests of fishing communities.

## Challenges for India

India must ensure that the implementation of sustainability rules does not impose excessive financial and regulatory burdens on small-scale fishers.

- India needs better scientific assessment of fish stocks to determine the actual health of marine fisheries.
- Stronger monitoring and traceability systems are required to prevent IUU fishing.
- Greater coordination is needed between the Central Government, coastal States, fishing communities and fisheries institutions.
- India must continue to protect the policy space and special flexibilities available to developing countries in future WTO negotiations.

## Way Forward

India should combine sustainable fisheries management with targeted support for small-scale fishers.

This requires better scientific data, digital monitoring of fishing activities, improved traceability, modern infrastructure, access to insurance and technology, and alternative livelihood opportunities for vulnerable fishing communities.

At the international level, India should continue to advocate a fair fisheries regime in which the major responsibility for reducing harmful subsidies is placed on countries with large industrial and distant-water fishing fleets.

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