

WTI Brown Bag Seminar



Title

Swimming in the Deep End: The Complexity of Fish Subsidies Negotiations in the WTO

Speaker

John Finn, Rules Division, World Trade Organization

When

Monday
25 November 2019
12:30-13:30

Where

Anna Nussbaum Auditorium
World Trade Institute
Hallerstrasse 6, 3012 Bern

Abstract

Negotiations on improving the rules on subsidies started in 2001 in the WTO and in 2005 WTO Ministers said they wanted to look at fisheries subsidies from the perspective of reducing those that lead to overcapacity and overfishing. Then in 2015 in the Sustainable Development Goals, the heads of government in the UN, in objective 14.6 stated that, by 2020, governments will prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation. That mandate was repeated in the WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference in 2017. With such a clear mandate from such a high level, why has it taken the WTO so long to come up with the rules to put it into effect? The presentation will explain some of the complications, problems and proposals that that are of import in the current negotiations. We will see that, not only are there the usual negotiation complexities of different parties having differencing positions and levels of ambition, there are also issues relating to maritime law, existing international rules on fisheries, and territorial disputes to consider. Furthermore, the focus of existing WTO rules are about trade – in the negotiations on fisheries subsidies, the WTO is, for the first time, addressing an issue related to sustainability. These and other factors mean a simple looking exercise is actually quite complex.

Biography of the speaker

John Finn has worked in the WTO since 1998, with ten years in the Agriculture and Commodities Division followed by ten years in the Trade Policy Review Division and, since the end of 2018, in the Rules Division. In AGCD he worked on the negotiations on agriculture until 2008. In the TPRD he was the Head of the Europe Middle East Unit responsible for the reports on the trade policies and practices of the WTO Members in the region. In Rules Division he is working on the negotiations on disciplines to fisheries subsidies under objective 14.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals which requires the WTO to negotiate international rules that would eliminate subsidies to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and prohibit certain forms of subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity. Before joining the WTO he worked for the Department of Agriculture and the Marine in Ireland. He has an MBA from University College Dublin and degrees in civil engineering and maths from Trinity College Dublin.