

Regional Workshop on
The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies
*and Support of its Implementation in the Bay of
Bengal Region*

16-17 May 2025

Fortune Beach Resort, Chennai

Background

According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report (SOFIA report), 38% of fish stocks worldwide are exploited beyond sustainable levels. Research has found that governments are spending \$22 billion annually on subsidies that drive overfishing. These subsidies mainly benefit industrial fishing fleets by artificially lowering the costs of fishing, such as fuel and vessel construction costs, enabling them to fish farther out to sea and for longer periods.

In June 2022, the World Trade Organization (WTO) concluded its 12th Ministerial Conference by adopting the landmark WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. The agreement prohibits subsidies that support (1) illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, (2) the fishing of overfished stocks for which no rebuilding measures are in place, and (3) the fishing of unmanaged stocks on the high seas. To date, 92 WTO members have ratified the 2022 Agreement, of the 111 members that are needed for the agreement to enter into force. WTO negotiations are also still ongoing on unresolved issues, including rules to curb subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity more broadly.

The rationalization and better alignment of fisheries subsidies with sustainability objectives is a major agenda in international fisheries discourse and sustainable development frameworks. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies represents a significant milestone in global efforts to promote sustainable fishing practices by curbing harmful subsidies that contribute to overfishing and the depletion of marine resources. However, there are also important questions about the practicalities of implementing these new rules, the support options available to developing countries with limited resources, and the way in which the agreement may affect small-scale fishers who rely on subsidies for their livelihoods and food security. This debate is particularly pertinent for countries bordering the Bay of Bengal, where fisheries play a crucial role in livelihoods, food security, and economic development. Effective implementation of this agreement, while addressing the concerns of developing nations, is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of our shared marine resources.

Purpose

This workshop aims to bring together trade and fisheries government officials from member States of the Bay of Bengal Programme and other South and Southeast Asian countries, policy experts, and representatives from relevant stakeholder groups to provide a platform for dialogue on the 2022 WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, its approaching entry into force, and tools to support its implementation.

The workshop will also provide an opportunity for governments from the Bay of Bengal region to update each other and exchange perspectives on their domestic situation with regards to acceptance of the agreement and implementation preparation, including expected technical assistance needs.

The Workshop will allow participants to:

- **examine** the 2022 agreement's rules;
- **appreciate** the practical implications of the rules;
- **share** experiences with other countries in the region;
- **understand** the tools that are available to support developing country WTO members in their implementation efforts.
- **Know** the WTO Fish Fund, a financing mechanism established to provide assistance for implementation to developing country members
- **Explore** the self-assessment tool developed by IISD to determine in practical terms what changes are needed domestically to comply with the agreement and identify where assistance may be needed.

The workshop is organized to assist in national ratification determinations and implementation preparation ahead of the UN Ocean Conference in June 2025.

Resource Persons

The resource persons would include experts from:

- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- World Trade Organization (WTO)
- International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
- Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organization (BOBP-IGO)
- RISE UP

Potential participants

- Countries: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Malaysia, Thailand
- Government officials from the Ministry/Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources or other relevant ministries dealing with WTO like Commerce, Trade and

External Affairs or relevant Departments/Agencies.

- The officials in the government with previous knowledge of the WTO agreement or those who have participated in the negotiations from the government will be desirable.

Nomination Process

- Three officials from the Government may please be nominated.
- The name, contact address, email of the nominates may be emailed to wto@bobpigo.org and bobp-wto@gmail.com before 31 March 2025 along with the copies of their Passports.
- All costs towards their participation including travel and accommodation will be covered by the Organizers. The Organizers will also provide supporting documents to apply for visa, however, the nominees should ensure that they get visa on time.

Draft Agenda

Time	Session	Speaker
Day 1		
09:30-10:15	Opening of the workshop	Delegates & Chief Guest
10:15 -10:30	Group photo and coffee/health break	
10:30-11:30	Session 1: Fisheries subsidies and sustainability: What is at stake? <i>Open Discussion</i>	Speaker TBD
11:30-13:00	Session 2: The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies: An overview <i>Open Discussion</i>	Andrea Mastromatteo Director, Rules Division, WTO
13:00-14:30	Lunch Break	
14:30-16:30	Session 3: Regional perspectives on the rules and their implementation	
14:30-15:30	<u>Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (Article 3)</u> <i>Open Discussion</i>	Rajdeep Mukherjee <i>Policy Analyst</i> <i>BOBP-IGO</i>
15:30-16:30	<u>Overfished stocks (Article 4)</u> <i>Open Discussion</i>	Rishi Sharma <i>Senior Fishery Officer</i> <i>FAO-RAP, Bangkok</i>
16:30-16:45	Coffee/health break	
	<i>Session 3: Continued</i>	
16:45-17:45	<u>Unregulated high-seas fisheries and transparency (Articles 5 and 8)</u> <i>Open Discussion</i>	TBD
Day 2		
09:00-10:00	Session 4: The WTO Fish Fund: Financial assistance for implementation <i>Open Discussion</i>	Jonathan Werner <i>Manager, WTO Fisheries</i> <i>Funding Mechanism</i>
10:00-11:00	Session 5: IISD's self-assessment tool for the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies <i>Open Discussion</i>	Tristan Irschlinger Senior Policy Advisor, Fisheries Subsidies, IISD

11:00-11:15	Coffee/health break	
11:15-12:15	Session 6: Regional Implications for WTO Agreement	James Nedumpara <i>Director, CTIL, New Delhi</i>
12:15-13:30	Session 7: The way forward in the region: Prospects for acceptance of the agreement and expected assistance needs for implementation <i>Open Discussion</i>	Officials from participating governments (5-7 min each)
13:30-14:30	Wrap-up and concluding remarks	