

AFP



Ted Danson



'Cheers' star brings fishing fears to WTO

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GENEVA (AFP) — American actor Ted Danson changed roles from barman to lobbyist on Wednesday as he brought his bid to protect the world's oceans and marine life from over-fishing to the World Trade Organisation.

Danson, 59, is best known for his role as bartender Sam Malone in the 1980s TV comedy "Cheers," but is also a board member of Washington-based environmental group Oceana, which campaigns for drastic cuts in global fishing subsidies.

"Seventy percent of our fisheries have reached the point where they are either overexploited ... or they're at the brink... 30 percent of our fisheries around the world are in decline, they've taken way too many fish out," Danson told AFP in an interview.

He said the problem is simply that there are "too many boats" on the seas, far more than what a sustainable fishing level requires.

Fishing fleets are kept afloat by subsidies amounting to between 30-34 billion dollars (20-23 billion euros) a year, Oceana said, citing a report by the University of British Columbia in Canada.

The United States called in March for a total WTO ban on fishing subsidies -- a move opposed by Japan and South

Korea.

Japan is the world's largest fishing subsidiser with annual payments amounting to 5.3 billion dollars a year, according to figures provided by Oceana.

"Many of these subsidies drive increases in capacity, which in turn results in overfishing and promotes other destructive fishing practices," Oceana said.

This means that some 90 percent of the "big fish" varieties such as swordfish, tuna and marlin have now disappeared, Danson said.

The actor acknowledged that cutting subsidies would have a harsh impact on

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already vulnerable fishing communities.

"Clearly there's sacrifice and loss in the future for some people. I think the question you have to ask is, do you want fish to be there for the rest of our lives?" Danson said.

Instead, governments and communities should accept a certain level of sacrifice and scale back their operations so that sustainable fishing can become the norm, the Cheers star added.

Danson became involved in campaigning about the world's oceans and beach pollution about 20 years ago when was living in California