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Fishing subsidies stink

Posted by [Andrew Sharpless](#) at 4:31 PM on 30 May 2007

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Most ocean conservationists are on pins and needles in anticipation of the results of this week's International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting. But I'm also thinking about another three-letter acronym and how much good may be coming out of it. W-T-O. That's right, the World Trade Organization.

In Geneva (and at the current Doha round) there's serious talk of cutting [government subsidies for commercial fishing](#) -- the fundamental driver for the unsustainable exploitation of the oceans. I just returned from there, where I met with Pascal Lamy -- head of the WTO -- and, together with Professor Rashid Sumaila of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, briefed a large number of the delegates.

Government subsidies of \$30-34 billion (to an industry whose dockside revenues are \$80 billion) swell the global fishing fleet to something like 200 percent of sustainable capacity. It's no wonder that [scientists predict](#) the collapse of our fisheries by midcentury. These subsidies can only be eliminated through multilateral action, since all countries will refuse to unilaterally disarm in the race to capture the last wild fish. That makes the WTO the best place where real change can happen.

I made a pit stop in London to help fuel some media attention on the issue. Check out the terrific piece in Canada's [The Globe and Mail](#), liberally quoting economist Sumaila, author of the most recent global study on subsidies.

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