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United States calls for widespread ban on fishing subsidies

By Deutsche Presse Agentur

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Geneva - The United States on Tuesday presented its radical proposals to sweep away billions of dollars worth of government subsidies, provided worldwide for the fishing industry, that it claims are exhausting fish stocks and driving some breeds to extinction.

The measures put forward by the US ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Peter Allgeier, would broadly ban subsidies for capturing wild ocean fish and subsidies for the construction and upkeep of fishing vessels, which it believes distort trade and threaten marine life.

Fishing subsidies, said to total 30 to 34 billion dollars a year, was under scrutiny as part of the Doha round of world trade negotiations at the WTO on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The US, which has won backing from New Zealand, Iceland and Australia, must convince other governments responsible for large fishing subsidies, among them Japan, the European Union and China.

Millions of people depend on fishing for all or part of their income, yet a recent study by fishery scientists concluded that, if current fishing trends continued, the fisheries worldwide would collapse beyond repair in 40 years time.

Oceana, an international group campaigning for the protection of the world's seas and that has monitored illegal fishing, has advised the US on its proposals, which it described as 'bold.' 'The subsidies lavished on the world's fishing fleets have created a global armada that is creating havoc in our oceans,' said Oceana campaign director, Courtney Sakai.

'These reckless government subsidies to the fishing sector need to stop.'