

Washington Trade Daily

A Fisheries Draft from the U.S.

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Geneva – The United States yesterday unveiled a draft negotiating text on how to end fishery subsidies – through strong disciplines in the World Trade Organization subsidies agreement to curb both fishing vessel overcapacity and overfishing itself (WTD, 3/29/07).

The world needs strong disciplines not only on government subsidies to fishing vessels but also on subsidies to operating costs, explained U.S. Ambassador Peter Allgeier in a statement to the Doha Development Agenda result negotiations special session.

The U.S. plan includes exceptions where programs do not lead to overcapacity or overfishing. It also would provide for Special and Differential Treatment for developing countries. Exceptions should lie in the zone of “actionable” subsidies under existing subsidy rules, Mr. Allegeier said. “A focused prohibition, specified exceptions and the new ‘serious prejudice’ criteria provide the basic framework of our proposal.”

Government subsidies that help promote the transition to sustainable fisheries would be allowed. The United States also called for strong transparency and notification procedures.

Several developing countries yesterday asked about the specifics of Special and Differential Treatment in the proposal as well as clarity on the treatment of small-scale fishing. Chile pointed out that any fisheries agreement should include specific SD&T points. China said the list of exceptions in the proposal moves the plan in the right direction.

Big Backers

Several other nations – including Australia, Ecuador, Canada, Iceland, Turkey, Argentina, Egypt, South Africa, and the Philippines – backed the U.S. proposal. Brazil has a similar plan in the works.

Speaking for the Africa/Caribbean/Pacific Group of nations, the Solomon Islands welcomed the U.S. provision exempting government-to-government payments for fishing rights, but insisted there must be a full exemption for all access payments. Barbados said that onshore processing should remain outside the new disciplines. Mauritius said the United States should clarify the treatment of access fees.

South Korea, Japan, Taiwan were generally opposed, saying they would not accept a general prohibition on fisheries subsidies. Fisheries ports must be exempted, Korea insisted. Taiwan said subsidies that do not harm trade should be allowed. Taiwan also called for the exemption of infrastructure and government fisheries services.