



Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry

Protocol Amending the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

OVERVIEW

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) has many dimensions and impacts ecosystems, economies, human security, international law, governance and human development. Combatting it is about supporting the integrity of the international legal framework and the rules-based international order. It is a top priority for Indo-Pacific states.

Australia can be a global leader in sustainable fisheries management through strengthened engagement in bilateral and multilateral cooperation – as has occurred in the process that led to the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies adopted on 17 June 2022 in Geneva during the 12th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference.

Being a good global citizen starts at home, through demonstrating best practice. Australia should accept an obligation to prohibit subsidies that support IUU fishing or overfished stocks. It is in Australia's interests to insert the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies into the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

This should be seen as part of a wider effort by Australia to combat IUU fishing as a whole-of-government issue linking security, trade, foreign policy and development cooperation. IUU fishing is, as Minister for International Development and the Pacific and Minister for Defence Industry Pat Conroy said at the launch of an AP4D paper on the topic, "A difficult problem that requires innovative solutions". An effective strategy to counter IUU fishing and ensure fisheries sustainability requires a whole-of-government effort.

Drawing on input from more than 30 fisheries experts consulted by the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D) for its recently-released report,¹ this submission offers recommendations for how Australia can be an effective partner in combatting IUU fishing. Acceptance of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies aligns with expert recommendations.

¹ See Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue, *What does it look like for Australia to be an Effective Partner in Combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing* (Canberra 2023): <https://asiapacific4d.com/idea/combating-iuufishing/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Deepening and Broadening Partnerships

Australia should build its global engagement and leadership through strengthened engagement in bilateral and multilateral cooperation that supports efforts to combat IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific region. By remaining engaged in and up-to-date with multilateral mechanisms, Australia can ensure initiatives on IUU fishing are fully implemented and produce results. This will require a concerted effort to ensure Australia's delegations bring expertise from across government, building relationships to develop quality projects that span across political cycles.

In particular, Australia should be a strong partner for the Pacific by supporting Pacific-led priorities.

2. Adopting Best Practice in Australia's Domestic Regulations

Australia can ensure it is a global leader in sustainable fisheries management through its own regulations. For example, Australia is currently looking at improving transparency in its domestic seafood supply chain to give consumers the confidence that imported seafood comes from sustainable sources and incentivise exporting countries to address IUU fishing.

Australia can lead by example in reducing industry subsidies. Doing so through international agreement ensures that this reduces overall reliance on imported seafood products sourced through unsustainable practices.

3. Continuing to Invest in Capacity-Building

Australia's capacity-building approach must continue to be informed by research to understand the key drivers of IUU fishing and the needs of partners, and be balanced in bringing expertise, collaboration and learning for both Australia and partner countries.

Australia can support implementation of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies through a capacity needs assessment of partners and targeted programs and human resources development to build expertise.

4. Promoting Innovation in Information Gathering

Open-source information gathering and sharing will be pivotal in managing fisheries at both the regional and global level, as will integrating new technology for data collection such as artificial intelligence and predictive analytics. Investing in research will enable further understanding of IUU fishing issues to support informed policy development and provide opportunities for Australia and partners to build stronger collaborations.

The Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D) asiapacific4d.com creates a new dimension in Australia's international policymaking by bringing together the development, diplomacy and defence communities to achieve new insights, develop new ideas and promote strategic collaboration around shared interests. It is a platform for ideas that encourage more integrated statecraft to maximise Australia's ability to influence regional and global developments.