

12 nations to take aim at fishing subsidies at WTO

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Thirty-one percent of the world's fisheries are harvested at biologically unsustainable levels, according to Food and Agriculture Organization figures.

The United States and 11 other countries on Wednesday announced the start of a drive at the World Trade Organization to eliminate harmful fishing subsidies that contribute to ocean depopulation.

The announcement fell on the eve of an annual conference in

Washington on ocean governance and environmental preservation.

In a joint statement, the representatives of the 12 nations, which included Australia, Norway, Singapore and landlocked Switzerland, said they would begin talks to develop a WTO agreement on transparency and reporting of fisheries [subsidies](#).

Thirty-one percent of the world's fisheries are currently being harvested at biologically unsustainable levels and another 58 percent are fished at maximum levels which prevent growth, according to Food and Agriculture Organization figures cited by the statement.

"To address this urgent concern, we are taking action with the goal of eliminating harmful subsidies, including those subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity," as well as illegal and unregulated fishing, the statement said.

The United States imports more than 90 percent of its seafood, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The announcement did not say which countries might be targeted for alleged subsidies.

According to Greenpeace, China has nearly 2,500 fishing vessels at sea, ten times as many as the United States. Greenpeace says unreported fuel subsidies to Chinese deepwater fishing fleets promote overcapacity.

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