

Joint Press Release

Ahead of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference: Prohibition of Fisheries Subsidies at the WTO Threatens the Sustainability of Small and Traditional Fisherfolks

Jakarta, February 24, 2024 - On February 23, 2024, small and traditional fisherfolk groups sent an open letter to the Indonesian Government regarding negotiations on a fisheries subsidy agreement at the WTO, which will prohibit subsidies for small fisherfolks in developing countries including Indonesia. In the draft WTO text currently being discussed, there are eight types of fisheries subsidies that will be prohibited because they contribute to IUU Fishing, Overcapacity and Overfishing.

Among the prohibited subsidies are fuel oil, insurance, employee costs, ship improvement subsidies, fishing technology, subsidies to support activities at sea and subsidies that cover fishing losses or fishing-related activities.

Rahmat Maulana Sidik, Executive Director of Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ) stated that *the discussion of fisheries subsidies at the WTO is very discriminatory for developing and less developed countries*. Where subsidies that should be maintained by developing countries, including Indonesia, are actually limited or even prohibited. *Meanwhile, developed countries and large-scale fishing industries can still maintain their subsidies as long as they can implement sustainable fisheries management measures. This is very discriminatory and unfair. "Because automatically fisheries management in developed countries is more sophisticated and better prepared,"* said Maulana.

"If the WTO wants to encourage changes to fisheries subsidies that have been provided by developing countries, in the end these negotiations will prohibit the provision of subsidies for small fisherfolks. So that means the WTO intervenes in national policy and even violates the constitution and laws and regulations in Indonesia. "We should be firm in rejecting the intervention carried out by the WTO," said Maulana.

In the current text, there is no clear exception for small fisherfolks in developing countries to continue to receive subsidies. Apart from small fisherfolks having to face the potential elimination of subsidies at the WTO, fisherfolks are also faced with the reality on the ground that currently they have difficulty accessing subsidies because of expensive and bureaucratic process.

Dani Setiawan, General Chair of the Indonesian Traditional Fisherfolks Union (KNTI) said that *"the ban on subsidies for small fisherfolks by the WTO threatens the lives of millions of fisherfolks and small communities who depend on the fisheries sector,"* said Dani.

"He also added that the implementation of fuel subsidies for fishermen so far is still not on target and is even expensive." Based on the 2021 KNTI study, it shows that 82% of small fisherfolks cannot access the subsidized fuel they should get. This is due to two things, namely the difficulty of processing letters of recommendation and the

lack of subsidized fuel distribution infrastructure that can be accessed by small fisherfolks. The biggest expense for small fisherfolks is to buy fuel, which covers 60-70% of the total cost of fishing. *Even small fishermen buy fuel at prices 30-40% more expensive than the general price,* added Dani.

Fikerman Saragih, Deputy Head of Knowledge Management, The People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice (KIARA) stated that small fisherfolks are the dominant fisherfolks in Indonesia, in fact the number of small fisherfolks in Indonesia has reached 2.4 million people. "The category of small fisherfolks in Indonesia is also clear that what is called small fisherfolks are those who use boats with a maximum size of 5 GT (referring to the Fisheries Law) and 10 GT (referring to the Law on the Protection and Empowerment of Fishers, Fish Farmers and Salt Farmers. Meanwhile, the number of fishers women *"There are 3.9 million people involved in pre-production and post-production activities in small-scale fisheries. Small-scale fisherfolks also catch to meet their daily needs and carry out fishing in a sustainable and non-exploitative manner,"* explained Fikerman.

"Currently, the condition of fisherfolks in Indonesia, as many as 6.3 million fishers, is facing uncertainty about being able to go to sea and get fish because it is caused by various factors, including competition for space between small fisherfolks and the fishing industry, beach filling/reclamation, mining, and climate crisis. "This uncertain condition will be exacerbated if negotiations at KTM-13 of the WTO result in the elimination of fisheries subsidies for small fisherfolks," stressed Fikerman.

We urge the Indonesian government not to approve the current fisheries subsidy text because it will endanger the livelihoods and sovereignty of fisherfolks as well as the fisheries sector as a whole. It is better to have no deal than a bad deal, which will harm the Indonesian people.

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