

NEGOTIATING GROUP ON RULES – FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

INFORMAL OPEN-ENDED MEETING AT HOD-LEVEL

21 April 2021

Speaking notes for the Director General

1. Thank you, Santiago and good morning excellencies and colleagues. That was a very informative report and I am glad to hear that there was constructive engagement by all of you Heads of Delegation at last week's meetings. I had promised last week that you would see me again soon, and now that you have finished your cluster of meetings, I thought it would be a good idea to join you today and share some further reflections on how I see this process unfolding over the next months. For now, I would like to emphasize three key points.
2. First, when Santiago says "Ministerial engagement" this means that we will be asking Ministers to meet virtually in July with a focus on fisheries subsidies and possibly one or two other topics. The aim of that meeting will be for Ministers to review a very advanced, hopefully final, text.
3. This brings me to my second point, **the text**. We have to present to Ministers a text that is complete and clean enough for them to constructively engage and take decisions. Thus options and brackets will need to be very few. We must have closure in July.
4. That means that our work here in Geneva over the next three months is truly critical. While clusters of meetings have served their purpose at the technical level, now we really need to pick up the pace, and engage in text-based negotiations that get us to compromise landing zones on all of the outstanding issues. To achieve this result, consultations will be convened frequently and in whatever configuration is necessary depending on the topic. I have told Santiago that I've rolled up my sleeves I am ready to work any time whenever he thinks he needs my involvement So, I will be joining some of these meetings and possibly convening some of my own. The aim of such meetings and consultations will be to deepen the clarity on key issues and views, as we continue to work through issues and seek to identify possible landing zones. Please be assured that the principles of transparency and inclusiveness will be respected, and that no decisions will be taken behind closed doors as Santiago has said it, and I want to repeat it again because this is how we'll build that trust that we need to get us through the finish line. While no delegation would be invited to every meeting, all voices will be consulted and heard, and Santiago will continue to report on all of these activities. My message here is that to succeed, we must all remain flexible, and continue to support the Chair as he guides the work toward an outcome. I also want to use this opportunity to thank Clarisse and the team from the Secretariat for their continued and able support to the chair. We must also prioritize these negotiations over these few months, including late nights and weekends if needed. As you know, this is what it usually takes in the final stage of negotiations and I'm really strongly appealing that we prepare to roll up our sleeves to get there.
5. And that brings me to my final point – your **engagement as heads of delegations**. It's really time for you to take the reins. Last week showed that you are ready to take the lead in the negotiations. Your delegates have been working hard on these negotiations for many years, and collectively have brought us to this final phase. This is really a major achievement that needs to be recognized and we are very very grateful and thankful to your delegates for the way that they have brought us so far. It is, however, only natural that the final hurdles now need to be dealt with at the political level, and

that's by you. Therefore, all Heads of Delegation—I can't say it often enough—should be ready to roll up your sleeves to work. If your delegates have not yet fully briefed you on all of the issues, please make sure that they do so. I can tell you that Santiago and I meet constantly to see how we can advance this. And please also maintain contact with your capitals to continually refresh your instructions as we move toward what all Members can live with. So many Ministers that I have talked with, literally two or three ministers practically every week either in person physically with proper social distancing or by Zoom, and all of them are really keen. I noticed a new spirit and I'm really happy they are keen to get this done. Yesterday, I was with the Trade Minister of Spain and we spent a lot of time on fisheries and I think it was a very good conversation. So that's why I want to say reiterating well-known positions in lengthy statements will not serve. Please just leave your scripts outside the room, and come in with open ears to listen to each other and then to exchange concrete ideas about how you could bridge your differences. This is the only way we can have an outcome by July.

6. So those are the three specific points I wanted to make. Before I hand the floor back to Santiago, I would like to emphasize one more thing. Wherever I go and whoever I interact with, I recall the preamble to the WTO Agreement, and the mandate of these negotiations. People, jobs, sustainability, livelihoods—these are the words that jump out at me from the preamble every time. To me, our job is to protect the fish and to protect the many millions of fisher men and women who directly depend on the fish. These two are not mutually exclusive - protecting one does not necessarily compete with protecting the other. In fact, fishing sustainably makes socio-economic sense. If there are no more fish in the sea, then the source of food security and livelihood, that was so talked about in the Marrakesh preamble, of those who depend on the fish also will be gone. I say all of this to remind us, as we engage over these next few months, of why we are here, doing this particular work. If we present to Ministers a text that meets that overall objective, then we will have done our job. On the other hand, if the focus over the next few months is to find ways to exclude ourselves from these responsibilities, then we will not be able to deliver on our mandate. And that is not really an option. Ladies and gentlemen, it is not.

7. With that, I would like to thank Santiago for inviting me to join you today. I would like to thank you and your delegates for the wonderful work that you are doing and for listening. I remain committed to reaching a meaningful outcome soon and I am sure that if we all put in the hard work needed, we will get there in July. I really want to end on this optimistic note. I believe we can do it. I just see light at the end of this tunnel. So let's just push a little bit more. Thank you.

8. I will leave you now and come back to you, and I wish you continued progress in the coming days. We'll talk soon.