

## **Fish Trade, Fisheries Subsidies and Sustainable Development Goal 14**

Keynote by

Dr. Josephine Ojiambo Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

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Excellencies, Distinguished panellists,

It is my pleasure to join you here today at this seminal event on the subject of fish trade and fisheries subsidies.

Along with Dr Kituyi, we are only too aware that time is running short. Whilst we remain optimistic regarding our ability to secure a positive outcome here in Buenos Aires, Argentina, addressing harmful fishing subsidies, we are also very much aware that even if an outcome which supports the implementation agenda of SDG14.6 and the early harvest we avidly seek, is secured, we will still need to go much further in the future in order to ensure sustainable fisheries trade for generations to come.

Back in June 2017, at the UN Oceans Forum, where we organised a joint event with UNCTAD, these aspects were strongly emphasised within the interventions received. Through our consultative processes undertaken since then, it has become clear that whilst we must remain practical, solution orientated, we must also be realistic.

This is why at the Commonwealth Secretariat, over the coming months, we have garnered support amongst our membership for a Commonwealth Blue Charter.

In order to move from negotiated text to meaningful implementation to support the advancement of SDG14, of which Goal 14.6 on addressing harmful fishing subsidies plays just one part, we believe this is where the Commonwealth's 'Blue Charter' can play an important role.

Our Blue Charter can be a vehicle through which to mobilise Commonwealth countries towards the cooperative attainment of the myriad of existing ocean-related commitments that they face, with particular focus on SDG 14.

The Commonwealth's Blue Charter is inextricably linked to the Charter of the Commonwealth, which brings together the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth - democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Our commitment to a principled approach to ocean planning, development and conservation will distinguish the Commonwealth's Blue Charter, and ensure its lasting durability.

Through the garnering of a political momentum which complements existing commitments (international, regional, thematic, sector-specific), we believe our principles on transparency - which has the most obvious link to both our Commonwealth Charter and the need to address harmful fishing subsidies through SDG14.6 - might best be garnered.

Small economies comprise the majority of our membership. They face formidable capacity constraints. These capacity constraints in reality, mean that

our members are far from the largest subsidisers. They also struggle to capture greater value within the fisheries sector.

In addition to confronting an un-level playing field with the potential to harm and undermine their export interests, because of capacity constraints and shortfalls many of our members also find it challenging to adapt to policy changes. So it should be remembered that even movement towards compliance with new international rules and regulations, costs.

As we move forward with our preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London, April 2018, and shared prosperity agenda, along with that of sustainability, we will continue to support our members in their efforts to advance the trade-related aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals, which rely on the multilateral trading system as a means of implementation.

We provide some of this support not only from the London based Secretariat, but also through our Small States office in Geneva. And we hope this support can be bolstered in the future, as we recognise the formidable challenge of the trade-related agenda.

With particular regarding to our thirteen Least Developed Country members, a number of these are likely to graduate from this status by around 2020, by which time the early harvest of SDG14.6, is hopefully secured. Some of these new graduates will be in the Pacific, and some, like the Solomon Islands, rely on the fisheries sector for a high share of their export earnings, and the formal employment opportunities offered through processing.

Through our collaborative working relationship with development partners such as UNCTAD - recently further strengthened through our agreed Memorandum of Understanding - we are undertaking detailed analytical work on the sectoral disbursements of Aid for Trade for forthcoming graduates. Some of the results, particularly, for some of the Pacific Least Developed Countries is encouraging in relation to the targeting of the fisheries sector.

Why? Because as new graduates may face an increase in trade costs because of a removal of tariff preferences, the need to secure an even level playing field through the removal of harmful fishing subsidies obviously assumes an even greater importance. We must work up to alleviate these competitiveness challenges which can undermine developmental interests.

It is precisely because of the interlinkages between the goals and targets included within SDG14, such as those related to market access and the increase of economic benefits for Small Island Developing States, that a holistic approach towards the implementation of SDG14.6 within a broader contextual framework related to the tremendous opportunity of the Oceans economy, we hope can be articulated through our advancement of a Commonwealth Blue Charter.

Our members have already agreed to these common values and principles. We hope they can be more effectively harnessed in order to really advance the trade-related SDGs.

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, SDG14.6 really is the first test of the ability of the multilateral trading system to effectively advance this agenda. Whilst the WTO remains central as the means of implementation, we must go further faster, together, where we can.

I look forward to the coming deliberations on the subject at hand.