



PR#373

PRESS RELEASE

Belize Participates in Virtual WTO Meeting

Belmopan. July 15, 2021. 4:45 p.m.

Belize today participated in the virtual meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Negotiations Committee at the ministerial level on fisheries subsidies. Hon. Ramon Cervantes, Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, led the delegation.

WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies commenced at the Doha Ministerial Conference held in 2001 with a mandate to clarify and improve existing WTO disciplines on fisheries subsidies. The Hong Kong Ministerial Conference held in 2005 expanded the mandate to include prohibition on certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. In 2017, the 11th Ministerial Conference agreed on a work programme to conclude an agreement on fisheries subsidies which delivers on Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 by the next Ministerial Conference scheduled for November 30 to December 3, 2021. The Director General of the WTO, in that light, called for the convening of the Trade Negotiations Committee at ministerial level on July 15, 2021 with the intention of closing the gaps in the fisheries subsidies talks ahead of the Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12).

In the negotiations, Belize in a concerted effort with the Caribbean Community is pursuing an agreement that balances sustainability of fish stocks and development through prohibiting and eliminating harmful subsidies that contribute to overcapacity, overfishing, and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing while supporting artisanal and small-scale fishers. Supporting the fisheries sector is of critical importance as it contributes significantly to the socio-economic wellbeing of fisherfolk and their families. The current negotiating text includes provisions that are mostly agreed. However, further work is necessary to incorporate the views and overarching concerns of small and vulnerable states across CARICOM. This

includes having appropriate and effective provisions on securing Special and Differential Treatment for Developing Countries and adoption of the principle of proportionate burden and responsibility-sharing that would target large-scale, industrial, distant-water fishing nations which contribute most to overfishing. Belize is advocating for the right to support resource poor and vulnerable artisanal and small fishers to fish within sovereign jurisdictions without being brought to dispute for violating the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. Throughout the negotiations, Belize aligns its position with the Caribbean Community and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States who place great interest in securing an agreement that retains the flexibility for government to support the growth of the fisheries sector while tackling harmful subsidies.

Belize continues to engage constructively in the fisheries subsidies negotiations and remains committed to their successful conclusion for the upcoming Twelfth Ministerial Conference.

Hon. Ramon Cervantes was supported by H.E. Lawrence Sylvester, Belize's Ambassador to CARICOM; Mr. Andy Sutherland, Director General of Foreign Trade; and trade officials from the Directorate General for Foreign Trade.

Ends