

Global Trade and the Environment

At a meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on 8 September, to discuss future global trade negotiations, developing countries rejected a series of proposals put forward by the United States, the European Union and other countries, aimed at achieving consistency between trade and environment goals.

Many developing countries fear that environmental provisions in trade agreements could be used to shut out their products from rich-country markets.

The proposals made included one by the EU to clarify the relationship between WTO rules and the trade provisions of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and a US suggestion that the WTO's trade and environment committee assess the environmental impact of the forthcoming talks. However, there was substantial

backing for negotiations to tackle fishing and farming subsidies that distort trade and damage the environment.

A new round of WTO trade liberalisation talks is due to be launched at a ministerial meeting in Seattle from 30 November–4 December. Trade diplomats in Geneva will begin detailed negotiations on 20 September on the ministerial declaration, which will set the agenda for the talks.

One NGO – the WWF-World Wide Fund for Nature – has already published its proposals for “greening” the new trade round. These include clarifying WTO rules to prevent challenges to trade measures taken under MEAs, greater transparency and accountability in the negotiations, and priority for negotiations that would benefit developing countries.