GLOBALISATION, TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES GOVERNANCE: A REVIEW OF POLICY TENSIONS

Ingrid Kelling, OECD, ingrid.kelling@oecd.org

ABSTRACT

Globalisation continues to impact the fisheries sector, aided by international governance frameworks in fisheries production and trade. Within these frameworks, tensions exist between trade facilitating measures and trade restricting measures. For example, UNCLOS extended Exclusive Economic Zones to 200 miles, resulting in a significant increase in volume and trade in fisheries commodities. On the other hand, there remain aspects of the international governance framework that tend to restrict trade, such as quality and safety standards and the use of trade measures for sustainability aims. The tension between these two aspects of globalisation in international fisheries governance will be considered in light of their effect on fisheries trade flows.

Keywords: international fisheries governance, trade

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has facilitated international trade in response to continued high demand for fish and fish products brought about by increased urbanisation, higher incomes and growing populations, particularly in developing countries [1].

The creation of Exclusive Economic Zones in the 1970s stimulated international trade when those countries with large fisheries but low domestic demand became exporters of fish and fish products, while those who had large fishing fleets fishing in previously unclaimed coastal waters became importers [2].

Fish and fish products are now among the most widely traded natural resource-based goods with approximately 38% of global fisheries production entering international trade (live weight equivalent), more than three times that of internationally traded meat products [3]. 50 million tonnes of fish were exported in 2002 (live weight equivalent), a growth of 40.7% from a decade earlier [4]. Shrimp is the most important commodity with about 18% of international trade in value terms in 2003. Demersal species constitute 11%, Salmon 8.4% and Tuna 8.2% of international trade by value [5].

Fish is traded in various forms, such as fresh for the consumer market or further processing, processed as intermediate products for further processing, or as finished products for final consumption. Traded products or groups of products are subject to tariffs or quantitative restrictions, typically these vary with the degree of processing with higher tariffs for more processed products in order to protect the processing industry in the country applying the tariff [6].

The international trading system, regulated through the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has been systematically reducing tariffs in order to increase trade liberalisation. Trade liberalisation is based on the economic principle of comparative advantage. Liberalising countries accept that the efficient use of resources facilitates economic growth, resulting in higher national income and improving welfare standards. Efficient resource use occurs when countries take advantage of assets, be they natural, human, financial or technological, to produce goods and services more efficiently and then trade those for goods and services they produce less efficiently. As liberalisation policies remove restrictions in trade between countries, producers have access to imports produced more efficiently as well as access to more
customers. Imports as well as exports increase, increasing pressure on domestic industries, resulting in more efficient production and increased price competition, benefiting consumers [7].

As a result of the Uruguay Round (1986-1994), international trade in fish and fishery products was further liberalised, with import duties in developed countries reduced to an average of 4.5%. However, barriers to trade in the presence of both tariff and non-tariff barriers still exist, as well as tariff peaks (a single tariff or group of tariffs that are particularly high) and escalations (where the tariff increases as the good becomes more processed). Non-tariff barriers include government measures, other than tariffs, that restrict trade flows. These reduce the opportunity for states to maximise their competitive advantage and may be deliberate or an unintended side effect of measures implemented for a different purpose [8]. They include safety and quality standards, regulations governing trade in endangered species and labelling. Furthermore, these may be different across countries due to the influence of differing national or private standards.

Tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers by public and private institutions can hinder developing country access to export markets. Continued access to foreign markets is a major factor for developing countries seeking to increase and maintain their high performance in fish trade.

The objective of this paper is to examine the international governance arrangements in place for fisheries trade and production and consider the tensions that arise between them. In this context, this paper will consider international regulations that facilitate trade such as reductions in tariff barriers, as well as trade restrictive measures such as quality and safety standards that can act as non-tariff barriers to developed country markets for many developing countries, and the use of trade measures to achieve sustainability aims. To this end, while trade liberalisation continues through WTO processes, governments look to alternative international institutions to utilise trade measures to ensure protection for the special requirements of a natural renewable resource such as fisheries. An accurate view of the impact of international governance frameworks on fisheries production and trade is therefore dependent on such a holistic approach.

This paper will begin with a general study of the proliferation of international governance arrangements in the fisheries sector. The next section will examine the principal tools of international fisheries governance that contain trade provisions. Finally, policy tensions between the trade facilitating and trade restrictive nature of international fisheries governance, the role of private entities in standard setting and the utilisation of trade measures for sustainability aims will be examined.

PROLIFERATION OF INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

International fisheries governance arrangements have become increasingly prolific (Annex 1). Although initially aimed at increasing harvesting and production, recent fisheries regulations have focused on ensuring resource sustainability. This is increasingly achieved through the use of ‘soft’ law non-binding arrangements that rely on the voluntary co-operation of individual states and can be more readily agreed to than legally binding laws (Fig. 1).
Figure 1. Proliferation of international fisheries governance arrangements

The proliferation of these regulations has had a direct impact on fisheries production and trade, with initial production rising in response to increased investment in the sector before trailing off as resources decreased and legislation was enacted with a view to protecting the resource (Fig. 2). This normally took the form of trade measures from international resource-protection oriented institutions through, for example, reducing trade in illegally-caught fish (using RFMO Catch Documentation Schemes coupled with national legislation prohibiting the landing of illegally caught fish or fish without catch certification), endangered species (CITES) or those not caught in a sustainable manner (eco-labelling schemes).

Figure 2. Global Capture Production and the Influence of Fisheries Frameworks

PRINCIPLE TOOLS OF INTERNATIONAL FISHERIES GOVERNANCE

International fisheries governance institutions frame international trade flows in fish and fish products. They either facilitate increased trade such as the WTO and bilateral agreements or control trade in certain types of fish and fish products, as do CITES and frameworks to diminish illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, for example.
WTO

In the governance of such international trade, perhaps the most important development of the past couple of decades has been the drive to further liberalise trade in fish and fish products through the multi-lateral trading system. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), signed in 1947, was designed to provide an international forum that encouraged free trade between member states by regulating and reducing tariffs on traded goods, and by providing a common mechanism for resolving trade disputes.

Early trade rounds concentrated on further reducing tariffs, before the Tokyo Round in the 1970s tackled trade barriers that do not take the form of tariffs. However, a new round, begun in the 1980s sought to reinforce and extend the multilateral trading system and the WTO consequently succeeded the GATT in 1994.

The following graph highlights the increasing importance the world trading system places on the WTO, as demonstrated through the increase in WTO membership by successive trade rounds (Fig. 3)

![Graph showing WTO membership increase](image)

Figure 3. WTO Membership

The current round of negotiations, the Doha round, is considering the issue of seafood tariff reduction in the Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) negotiating group and is one of seven sectors in which calls were made for tariffs to be eliminated completely [9]. NAMA products account for almost 90% of world merchandise exports [10]. However, global markets are not yet fully integrated due to the presence of some tariffs in the most important markets. The level of tariffs varies widely across countries, reflecting the particular fishing sector structure and the relative importance of the harvesting and processing sectors in each country.

Overall tariffs have been reduced considerably over the past 50 years, and as a result, market openness has increased significantly over that time. The removal of tariffs, although facilitating trade liberalisation, could pose problems for developing countries that rely on the system of preferential tariffs currently in place as trade liberalisation reduces the advantages of preferences and affects exporters of value added products. For example, the EU has a generous system of preferences in place for the least developed countries, overseas countries and territories and African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) countries covered by the Cotonou Agreement. ACP countries receive more favourable treatment (zero tariffs) than other developing countries [11].

The role of subsidies in the fishing industry has also played a high-profile role in the current round. Although fisheries may play a relatively small role in the economy as a whole, trade in fish and fish
products may be significant for the economies of some countries. There has been much discussion of the trade effects of government financial transfers to fisheries in the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies. Governments pay some US$6 billion a year to support the fisheries sector in OECD countries. About one third of this is for research and management of fisheries and enforcing regulations, one third for fisheries infrastructure such as ports and final third is in the form of direct payments and cost-reducing transfers [12]. It is difficult to generalise about the likely effect on trade as the impact on transfers on catches and stocks, and therefore potential supplies of fish to domestic and world markets, depends to a great extent on the management regimes of importing and exporting countries. However, while there is clearly a need for government intervention to address pressing social issues or regional development problems, linking assistance to fishing activity carries a significant risk that a fundamental objective of sustainable fisheries – stock conservation – will be compromised.

Regional trade agreements

International trade flows are increasingly concentrated within regional groups formed by large trading nations, encompassing trade in goods, services, labour, environmental co-operation and others. As well as going beyond traditional liberalising commitments, regional trade agreements (RTAs) are increasing in scope, with 14 RTAs now in force between African countries, the launch of the recent India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum and between RTAs themselves, such as EU-MERCOSUR.

Almost all countries in the world and virtually all WTO Members are party to or in the process of negotiating at least one RTA: at the end of 2002, 250 regional trade agreements had been notified to the WTO with a further 50 under negotiation [13] (Fig. 4).

![Number of Regional Trade Agreements](image)

World Trade Organisation

**Figure 4. Growth in RTAs**

Regionalism is a policy option for most countries and a permanent feature of the international trading environment. Countries that have traditionally favoured the multilateral approach to trade liberalization (such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore and India) have adopted increasing numbers of RTAs. Their significance relates to the fact that intra-RTA trade accounted for 40% of world trade (merchandise
imports) in 2000 and for over 50% in 2005. Furthermore, EU intraregional trade accounted for some 66-68% of the EU’s total trade with the world [14].

Significantly, RTAs are exempted from the WTO principle that the lowest tariff applicable to one member must be extended to all (Most Favoured Nation principle). Consequently, RTAs may advance agendas that are not related to trade or weaken the power of poor countries in multilateral trade negotiations by fragmenting coalitions [15].

UN system

Sustainability frameworks hold a unique position in international trade schemes as their primary aim is to restrict trade: either for general sustainability aims such as CITES that restricts trade in endangered species, or for specific goals, such as the utilisation of catch documentation schemes, the prohibition of landings and transhipments, import bans and restricted access to goods and services through port state measures can restrict trade in illegally-caught fish.

There is currently no overarching legally binding agreement that addresses the effective and comprehensive protection of biodiversity on the high seas beyond the general mandate set by the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea (LOS). However, other legal instruments take measures to ensure sustainability aims are met.

For example, CITES, an international agreement with 166 signatories entered into force on 1 July, 1975. It lists 68 species of fish in Appendix II; species not necessarily threatened with extinction but could be unless trade in them is strictly regulated.

The United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (FSA) on highly migratory and straddling stocks fills in gaps in LOS. It provides a framework for the conservation and management of such stocks. It entered into force in 2001 and 59 states are signatories, compared to 148 parties to the LOS Convention and without some important distant-water fishing states such as Japan, South Korea and China. The agreement obliges members to adopt a precautionary approach to fishing these stocks. The agreement also reiterates the obligation of States to control the fishing activities of their vessels in international waters and requires them to minimize pollution, waste and discards of fish.

An important measure of the FSA is that it mandated the establishment of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), bringing fishing nations together to promote conservation and management of stocks. The advent of the use of internationally-agreed market-related measures by RFMOs has demonstrated the increasing influence of sustainability frameworks on trade flows. RFMOs are management organisations comprised of states that choose to co-operate on managing fisheries resources. They target a geographical area and/or species and can encompass regulations affecting harvest gear, technical arrangements for vessels, Catch Documentation Schemes and port State measures. Catch documentation provisions exist in CCSBT, IOTC, IATTC, IDCP and are being considered by ICCAT [16]. These schemes prevent fish caught by illegal vessels from undermining the conservation and management measures adopted.

For example, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources’ CDS insists that toothfish landed in the ports of CCAMLR parties, transhipped to their vessels or through their ports or imported into their territories, may not be sold without the required documentation of toothfish in order to discourage trade in illegally caught toothfish [17]. In 1996, ICCAT recommended that its members take measures to prohibit importation of bluefin tuna in any form from the non-ICCAT member countries of Belize, Honduras and Panama – the first time such multilateral trade restrictive measures had been authorized by an international fisheries management body.
IUU frameworks

Illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing activity is a serious global problem that depletes fish stocks and undermines efforts to ensure renewable stocks for the future. IUU fishing is the result of economic factors such as growing demand, coupled with overcapacity and weak governance where certain countries have failed to live up to their international responsibilities. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that IUU activity now constitutes up to 30% of total catches in some areas. As well as undermining the sustainability of stocks, it also creates an unfair economic advantage for fish pirates who don’t adhere to international labour standards, distort markets with illegal products and reduce incentives for legal fishers to adhere to the rules. Despite national and international efforts, IUU fishing continues to thrive.

In recent years, fish piracy has moved to the forefront of the international fisheries policy agenda, and governments around the world have stepped up efforts to combat it. The High Seas Task Force was a group of fisheries ministers (United Kingdom (Chair), Australia, Canada, Chile, Namibia, New Zealand) and international NGOs (Earth Institute, IUCN-World Conservation Union, WWF International), founded in 2003, whose aim was to reduce the level of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing on the high seas through the formulation and eventual implementation of recommendations to combat some of the issues outlined above. Over two years, expert panels identified the legal, economic, scientific and enforcement factors that permitted IUU activity to thrive.

The High Seas Task Force, having fulfilled its duties, was disbanded in March, 2006. Yet each Member of the group is both forwarding a particular element of the recommendations as well as attempting to engage like-minded countries and adopt common advocacy positions. One of these is to support greater use of port State and trade measures in the fight against illegal fishing [18].

POLICY TENSIONS

Globalisation and liberalisation of world fish trade, while offering many benefits and opportunities also present new challenges. Consequently, there are exceptions to the general requirement for open trade between WTO members. Minimum standards necessary for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health as well as the environment, are reflected in WTO provisions such as the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) Agreement, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement. The aim of these agreements is to address legitimate goals whilst ensuring a minimal impact on trade and preventing the use of such regulations as disguised protectionism.

Secondly, as a trade organisation, the WTO does not address the special renewable natural resource characteristics of fish stocks. Instead, whilst dismantling trade barriers in the trade arena through the WTO, states are on the other hand turning to other international fora in order to restrict trade in the pursuit of sustainability objectives.

The world trading system in fisheries is therefore comprised of both international governance arrangements that facilitate trade as well as those that may restrict trade according to determined characteristics of products. This creates policy tensions within the trading system, particularly when these restrictions may be enforced by private institutions, such as quality, safety and environmental standards applied in different value chain elements. This section will consider the tensions arising between trade restrictive and trade facilitating frameworks in the international system.

WTO rules framing international fisheries trade
Standards play an important role in the regulation of international trade. Standards can improve information flows between suppliers and consumers about the characteristics and quality of products, facilitate market transactions and allow comparisons by consumers between products with similar characteristics. Standards also ensure quality and solve common problems, such as the assured safety of products.

The SPS and TBT Agreements were adopted by WTO members in 1995 and altered the conditions by which food are traded in the international system. They ensure that requirements such as quality, labelling and methods of analysis applied to internationally traded goods are not misleading to the consumer or discriminate in favour of domestic producers or goods of different origin. Minimum standards guard those areas where lower standards may inflict harm on consumers but that harm is not readily identifiable to the consumer. Such non-discriminatory information can be used by the consumer to make choices about which products to buy. Therefore the harmonization of standards facilitates trade.

The SPS Agreement allows members to take scientifically based measures to protect public health. The agreement commits members to base these measures on internationally established guidelines and risk assessment procedures. In the case of particularly stringent measures, countries must present scientific justification. When existing scientific evidence is insufficient to determine risk, members may adopt measures on the basis of available information, but must obtain additional information to objectively ground their assessment of risk within a reasonable period of time. Generally speaking, the SPS Agreement is a compromise that permits countries to take measures to protect public health within their borders so long as they do so in a manner that restricts trade as little as possible [19].

Likewise, the TBT Agreement strikes a delicate balance between the policy goals of trade facilitation and national autonomy in technical regulations. The agreement attempts to extricate the trade-facilitating aspects of standards from their trade-distorting potential by obligating countries to ensure that technical regulations and product standards do not unnecessarily restrict international trade. The TBT Agreement works toward this end in three ways. The agreement encourages 'standard equivalence' between countries, in other words, the formal acceptance of the standards of other countries through explicit agreements. It also promotes the use of international standards. Lastly, it mandates that countries establish enquiry points and national notification authorities (the two may be the same body) in order to answer questions about SPS regulations and notify other nations of new regulations respectively. Enquiry points compile all available information in that country on product standards and trade regulations and provide it to other members upon request. The national notification authorities report changes in trade policy to the WTO and receive and take comments on these measures [20].

The number of notifications based on the SPS agreement supports the increasing application of SPSs in trade. The increase is due likely to both increased concerns about food, animal and plant safety and the expansion of world trade. More than two thirds of SPS negotiations are from OECD countries and over half relate to food safety [21]. The total number of notifications based on the SPS agreement submitted to WTO during a given year doubled in the last five years from 220 in 1995 to 438 in 1999. Since SPSs normally remain valid once enacted, the cumulative number of active SPSs has grown even faster. Since developed countries have greater resources overall to devote to food, animal and plant safety standards, it is reasonable to find a greater number of notifications from developed country Members. Submissions from developing country Members, however, have also increased from 1995 to 1999 [22].

Where international standards, guidelines and recommendations are in place, member countries are encouraged to comply with these, although this does not prevent them from adopting higher standards if there is scientific justification, an appropriate assessment of risks and where the standards are neither inconsistent nor arbitrary.
Standards also involve costs in complying with the standard and certification of this compliance. As a result, standards may be trade restrictive as there may be certain elements in the value chain that find it harder to meet these standards than others. Developing countries in particular may face various problems associated with SPS/TBT compliance, often because the burden of responsibility is shifted to the exporting processor or traders who have to ensure safety and quality standards are met along each element of the value chain before export. This could marginalize small producers from export markets altogether. In this way, standards and technical regulations may be used by protectionist States to discriminate against foreign suppliers or to gain strategic trade advantages for domestic firms over foreign competitors [23].

According to a study funded by the Germany Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), the frozen food exporters of Bangladesh have spent about US$2.2 million per annum and the government spends about US$224,000 per annum maintaining the HACCP monitoring programme. The total cost to the industry in 1997-8 to upgrade export processing plants was estimated at US$17.6 million [24]. Similarly, in Uganda, measures to comply with international fish trade requirements are estimated to have increased operating costs of fish processing plants by 50% [25].

**Private standard setting**

Nevertheless, in many areas public regulation continues to lag behind private standards. Consolidation and concentration have characterised the major food manufacturing and processing firms and power has shifted to retailers who are now responsible for product quality and safety and other attributes and who do not wish to risk their all-important reputation.

This has seen the development of private standards by retailers, largely driven by large-scale producers and retailers in developed country markets that put specific requirements on suppliers, which determine access to buyer’s supply chains and establish de facto market access for developing countries. In addition, these standards have become de facto global standards as food systems are increasingly interlinked across boundaries and increasing co-ordination of production and distribution. This has seen an emergence of non-government global standard-setters, such as the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative and the Global Food Safety Initiative. On the one hand, these may impose decisions on players at different points in the system, effectively acting as quasi-public standards. On the other, they may be more inclusive and allow for consultations with NGOs, farmers and public authorities in determining standards and their implementation. Nevertheless, they may often be ahead of public standards and in this way, the private sector is taking the lead in shaping global standards in some areas.

These standards differentiate between products and consolidate the brand name through the use of standards that may go further than public standards in both scope and focus. Companies use and may encompass process attributes beyond publicly legislated issues of product quality and safety, such as the environment, labour and ethics.

These may in turn have an effect on the direction and pace of public legislation on such issues. The rise of private standards, for example, in the eco-labelling sector has itself influenced public environmental regulation. The FAO adopted voluntary guidelines at its 26th Session on 7-11 March 2005, setting out general principles that should govern eco-labelling schemes including independent auditing, transparency, accountability and the good use of science. Based on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, they express the minimum requirements for assessing whether a fishery may be eco-labelled. However, the decade-long work of the Marine Stewardship Council undoubtedly brought this issue to public attention, which resulted in a discussion and consequent FAO Guidelines. Therefore, should public institutions concede the regulation of such areas to what are already de facto international food standards?
In this regard, it is interesting to note that private standards are often reliant on public systems of oversight. Private standards are still audited by third parties credited to ISO 45000 to ensure credibility and a reliable liability defence in the public eye [26]. To some extent therefore, public institutions are still seen as providing the ultimate public good.

The advantage of public standards in these areas is that they are subject to the rules of the international community and therefore subject to the rules of non-discrimination and may not be an unjustifiable barrier to trade. The proliferation of private standards raises concerns over their impact on trade, particularly by developing countries who view such standards (and labels) as disguised barriers to entry of developed country markets. Also, countries can be brought to the WTO, but not companies [27]. But as the economic benefit of being linked to powerful food firms strengthens, so does the need to comply with their standards.

However, developing countries may have particular problems meeting such requirements. Standards, both public and private are created by and for industrialised societies. Costs of compliance may be high, particularly for those countries where food safety and quality standards are less developed, such as developing countries and where no provision for aid to them exists.

Although public standards are legitimate under international law in the interest of protecting human, plant and animal life as reflected in the WTO provisions, trade is truly only facilitated when products are standard-compliant. For those countries that are unwilling or unable to be compliant, these standards pose a barrier to trade and access to markets. This is even more so in the case of private standards that are not subject to provisions to aid developing countries.

**Policy tensions in international fisheries governance**

By facilitating international trade, certain international governance frameworks have played an important role in the globalisation process. However, continued reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers through the auspices of the WTO do not reflect true liberalisation in international fisheries trade.

The WTO, as a trade organisation, is clearly not mandated with such sustainability concerns. However, increased production and trade has resulted in the exploitation of marine resources, sometimes beyond biologically sustainable limits [28]. The world trading system does not take into account the special resource protection needs of natural renewable resources. Governments turn instead to alternative forms of international governance frameworks with trade mandates in order to enhance protection.

Using internationally agreed instruments impacting trade such as CITES and certain RFMO regulations, states can enact measures that restrict trade for products with certain attributes and/or to achieve sustainability aims. It is therefore necessary to adopt a holistic view of international fisheries governance in order to determine the true impact of all relevant international fisheries frameworks on fish production and trade.

**CONCLUSION**

The regulation and protection of fish stocks using the trade measures of international organisations has meant that trade in fish and fish products is not as liberalised as a first glance at the WTO mechanisms might indicate. WTO trade liberalisation is therefore only one aspect of the various barriers to trade impacting on the industry. The sector requires a balance of traditional notions of trade facilitation with actions to ensure resource protection, food safety and quality. An accurate view of the impact of fisheries
governance frameworks on production and trade can only be achieved with a holistic analytical framework.

ANNEX 1 PROLIFERATION OF INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS IN FISHERIES

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<td>Kyoto Declaration on the Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security and Plan of Action</td>
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<td>International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity</td>
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<td>Niue Treaty on Co-operation in Fisheries Surveillance and Law Enforcement</td>
<td>International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks</td>
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<td>Agreement to promote compliance with international conservation and management measures by fishing vessels on the high seas (FAO Compliance Agreement)</td>
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ENDNOTE

i Opinions and ideas pertaining to this document are those of the author and not necessarily shared by the OECD and its member countries.