

## ICS urges WTO to prioritize maritime transport in multilateral trade talks

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The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has called for maritime transport to be prioritized in multilateral trade negotiations. It made the request ahead of the 12th Ministerial Conference, which has been indefinitely postponed due to the Omicron variant. A pared-down schedule of meetings of WTO Ministers and governments will go ahead. The meetings will discuss the critical issues and challenges confronting the multilateral trading system and their impact on the global economy.

ICS has urged the WTO Director-General, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, to pay closer attention to maritime transport in WTO trade initiatives and negotiations.

Formal discussions on the liberalization of maritime transport services at the WTO have been halted for several years. The commitments from national governments towards the liberalization of maritime services that were achieved in previous negotiations have lacked legal certainty. That said the ICS had left the industry in perpetual limbo.

Responding to the call by ICS, Okonjo-Iweala said: "With all the supply chain issues we experienced this year, there is increasing interest in the maritime transport sector, including the underlying issues leading to supply chain bottlenecks".

She added that WTO met with some of the major shipping companies and was planning to hold a comprehensive dialogue with the entire sector in 2022 in order to gain a better understanding of these issues.

Guy Platten, Secretary-General at ICS, said that "we are very encouraged by Dr Okonjo-Iweala's message to the shipping industry at this meeting. There are many issues that unite ICS and the WTO, as the gatekeeper of free trade throughout the world, but none more so than our shared values and principles of open and unimpeded access to international markets. We look forward to engaging with her at the WTO in this comprehensive Dialogue that has been proposed for next year".

The WTO and ICS co-hosted a roundtable dialogue titled “The Role of Maritime Transport in the Post-COVID Recovery”, which explored the findings from the ICS report “Protectionism in Maritime Economies” (link below).

<https://www.ics-shipping.org/current-issue/protectionism-in-maritime-economies-study/>