

Navigating the Green Frontier: The Evolving Role of the WTO in Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

When stating that “The escalation of environmental degradation places unprecedented pressure on the multilateral trading system...”, the manuscript could benefit from specifying which categories of environmental degradation (e.g., GHG emissions, biodiversity loss) most directly intersect with trade disciplines.

The discussion of China’s industrial expansion following WTO accession mentions “studies of China’s industrial sectors” but does not identify which sectors (e.g., steel, cement, petrochemicals). More precision would improve empirical rigor.

The manuscript presents mutual supportiveness as “aspirational” but should reference concrete instances where panels used systemic integration (VCLT Article 31(3)(c)) to reinforce environmental objectives, even if limited.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The sentence “Analysts observing this era argued that the dispute settlement system tended to frame environmental policies as exceptions rather than integral components...” oversimplifies the scholarship. Consider distinguishing between Appellate Body evolution (post-2001) and earlier panel practice.

The aim of the study states its purpose clearly but could benefit from narrowing the analytical scope. Currently, it promises to cover jurisprudential, institutional, and regulatory evolution, which is ambitious for a single article.

The manuscript asserts that references to sustainable development “rarely produce concrete doctrinal shifts.” This strong claim would benefit from examples of cases where sustainable development was invoked but not operationalized, such as China–Rare Earths.

The text mentions that PPM-based distinctions pose problems for WTO law but does not differentiate between mandatory versus voluntary schemes. Adding this nuance would strengthen the doctrinal analysis.

The sentence “On the other hand, critics warn that such measures risk functioning as disguised restrictions...” would benefit from elaborating how WTO panels distinguish legitimate environmental purpose from protectionist intent, referencing methodological tools used in jurisprudence.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.