December 2019

Seafood Ethics Common Language Group e-alert
(amalgamation of news alerts issued to SECLG circulation list by email in December 2019)

Seafood Ethics Common Language Group
https://www.seafish.org/article/the-seafood-ethics-common-language-group
https://www.seafish.org/article/ethics-in-seafood

Seafish briefing notes

Seafish summary of fishing references by country in TIP report 2019.

Seafish analysis of Global Slavery Index 2018 fishing risk indicators by country.

South East Asia
The report and film details the decline in fish populations, recent trends in Vietnamese vessel activity and legislative and enforcement mechanisms implemented by the Vietnamese authorities since the EU carding decision in October 2017. Through these investigations EJF has also uncovered several incidences of child labour on board Vietnamese vessels, with the youngest worker only 11 years old. Far from looking to better control the sector, Vietnam aims for $10.5 billion in exports from seafood products in 2019, up by 23% compared to 2017 figures. Outright denial of the scale of the problem has exacerbated many of the industry’s afflictions. EJF make several critical recommendations that require urgent implementation, and we look forward to working with you to tackle these issues.

NGOs, businesses urge US Labor Department include distant-water fishing in forced labor list. 17 December 2019.
Greenpeace USA, AFL-CIO, Human Rights Watch, Environmental Justice Foundation, Whole Foods Market, and 19 other groups have sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Labor requesting the organization end its practice of only considering a country’s territorial waters when creating its List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. The letter comes in the wake of a Greenpeace report (see below) identifying forced labour issues in Southeast Asia.

Thai electronics firm compensates exploited workers in rare award. 11 December 2019.
Burmese migrants who were illegally charged excessive recruitment fees to secure jobs at an electronics manufacturer in Thailand are being compensated in a rare award expected to spotlight a practice known to trap workers in modern slavery. Cal-Comp Electronics, which supplies to tech giants such as HP Inc, is reimbursing at least 10,000 workers, according to Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN), a charity in Thailand, and Electronics Watch, a global watchdog. The repayments could total about 300 million baht, an estimate based on the number of workers and average sum of 20,000 baht they paid, more than six times the legal limit in Myanmar, MWRN said.

In the wake of the U.S. decision to suspend $1.3 billion in trade privileges for Thailand, 24 organizations participating in the Seafood Working Group published a statement on Human Rights Day strongly urging the Thai government to take steps to afford all workers their internationally recognized rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining and to end widespread use of forced labor. The organizations also urge leading seafood companies in the Seafood Task Force to ensure that workers’ rights are fully protected in their supply chains. With six months to make reforms for US #GSP trade benefits, the Seafood Working Group calls on the Thai government and Seafood Task Force to afford internationally recognized worker rights to all workers and end egregious abuse throughout the Thai economy.

This relates to: USTR Announces GSP Enforcement Actions and Successes for Seven Countries. 25 October 2019.

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has announced that the U.S. government would suspend $1.3 billion in trade preferences for Thailand under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) based on its “failure to adequately provide internationally-recognized worker rights... such as protections for freedom of association and collective bargaining”. GSP program eligibility will be revoked for 573 products in six months’ time, giving Thailand a unique opportunity to make important reforms and have the trade benefits reinstated. The USTR decision to suspend trade benefits focuses on repression and denial of fundamental labor rights of all workers in Thailand, not only on the abuse of migrant workers. Following the USTR announcement, major seafood exporters Thai Union Group and Charoen Pokphand Foods announced the trade preferences change would have no material impact on their business operations because their main exports, tuna products, were not covered under Thailand’s GSP program. The Thai government has six months’ time, until 25 April 2020, to make changes to become eligible for trade privileges again in 2021.

Greenpeace blog. 5 reasons modern slavery at sea is still possible in 2019. 9 December 2019.

Slavery continues to plague the fishing sector in Southeast Asia, according to a new report from Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Seabound: The Journey to Modern Slavery on the High Seas Relying on interviews, documents, and other information, the report painted a picture of Indonesian, Filipino, and other Southeast Asian migrant fishermen working aboard distant-water vessels owned by foreign countries and suffering from mistreatment, human rights abuses, and forced labour. The report accused 13 foreign distant-water vessels registered in China, Taiwan, Vanuatu, and Fiji of labour abuses such as deception, wage withholding, excessive overtime, and physical or sexual abuse. Five reasons modern slavery at sea is possible were highlighted: vulnerable job-seekers from Indonesia and the Philippines are seeking better paid employment; shady employment agencies lure workers with false promises; fish populations are declining rapidly; transhipment; and a lack of governmental oversight or support. Greenpeace Southeast Asia strongly emphasises the need for ASEAN member States, particularly Indonesia and Philippine governments, to take concrete policy actions to address the labour and environmental issues cited in the report, as well as measures to deal with reportedly high levels of discrimination on DWF vessels.

Tools and initiatives


In response to the emerging public international awareness of terrible abuses which occur at sea invariably out of sight and therefore out of mind, Human Rights at Sea has launched an on-line platform for the development of the new soft-law instrument; the ‘Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea’. The principal aim of the Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea (“the Declaration”) is to raise global awareness of the abuse of human rights at sea and to mobilise a concerted international effort to put an end to it. The end goal of this work is to achieve a finalised
soft-law and voluntarily applied version of the Declaration within three to five years that is supported at State level around the world.

**Updated Stronger Together progress reporting tool.** December 2019.
In the first week of January Stronger Together will launch the updated version of the Progress Reporting Tool (PRT). The PRT is a pioneering online self-assessment tool, which supports companies to monitor and measure progress made and to highlight their next steps in addressing modern slavery risks within their businesses and supply chains. It is available to use for free for businesses that sponsor the Stronger Together Consumer Goods Project. The improved functionality will make it even easier to use and includes: A new visual dashboard allows users to quickly track progress and identify areas requiring further action; Easy benchmarking allows users to compare scores to others in their sector; Intuitive navigation provides an improved user experience; Downloadable reports enable users to share progress internally, share with clients or include within Modern Slavery Statements.

**HRAS opinion piece: Wider industry awareness on human rights at sea is vital.** 20 December 2019.
David Hammond shares his insights into achieving greater equality, justice and freedom within the maritime industry in the next years, highlighting that not much progress has been made so far while wider awareness on this important topic is of outmost importance.

**Recruitment**

**HRAS briefing note.** Ending Exploitative Recruitment Fees for Seafarers and Fishers in the Maritime Sector. 2 January 2020.
Human Rights at Sea (HRAS) has published its latest briefing note on exploitative recruitment fees in the maritime sector and calls for an end to such burdensome fees for workers in a call to action. From evidence gathered by HRAS, workers and especially migrant workers are almost always made to pay for the opportunity of work either directly or indirectly by unscrupulous third-party facilitators operating under the banner of charging ‘standard service costs’ which in reality are often unreasonable at least, and often unlawful at best. Fees charged are invariably excessive and underpin an exploitative service industry often bringing life-long debt to workers, their dependants and extended families in the form of debt-bondage. There is also a lack of transparency throughout this human supply chain. Such abusive and exploitative practices must therefore be continuously publicly challenged and ultimately curtailed, if not stopped throughout the global maritime sector.

On 21 November 2019, some 100 organisations from business, government and the third sector, came together to examine the barriers to Responsible Recruitment and discuss what can be done to overcome them. The inaugural Responsible Recruitment UK Forum was co-hosted by the Responsible Recruitment Toolkit (RRT) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and this collaboration set the tone for the event where the key takeaway was that organisations must work together to ensure Responsible Recruitment in supply chains.

**ILO publications**

**Ship to Shore Rights Less is More: How Policy and Technology can Impact the Thai Labour Market for Work in Fishing.** 27 December 2019.
This report demonstrates how simple vessel upgrades help purse seiner owners reduce labour demand and make their industry more sustainable. Installing simple hydraulic “power block” systems to help pull in nets (photo) has reduced crew size by 40% on board a working Pattani purse seiner reconfigured with support from the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). An upgrade to the on-board fish refrigeration system preserved fish quality and has
increased revenue per trip by 10%. With lower labour costs and higher earnings, net profits are expected to climb up to 59% in the second year after reconfiguration. Vessel owners can earn back the THB 1.75 million reconfiguration costs in just one year. These changes make possible for immediate improvements in working conditions and wages and, on a larger scale, help balance Thai fishing’s tilted labour market and reduce the pressures that drive the industry’s forced labour problem. The ILO study recommends government support for a lending programme to support reconfiguration of Thai purse seiners that are independently


A new short film shows how trade union organizing and CSO support for migrant workers have helped bring seafood processing workers and fishers to the centre of the debate over reform of the Thai fishing industry. This is the fourth short film in the Ship to Shore Rights series that includes Ratification of the Forced Labour Protocol (P. 29), Best practices for enforcement in fishing, and Revised Good Labour Practices programme for the seafood industry. See them all here

Coming in Q1 2020 – ILO ‘Endline’ research on working conditions in Thai fishing and seafood
The Ship to Shore Rights Project’s Endline Research will report in Q1 2020 on changes in the fishing and seafood industry since the ILO’s 2017 Baseline Report. The research surveyed 470 workers across 11 port areas in Thailand on key issues including recruitment, contracts, pay, hours, getting help, and forced labour.

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