Ethics in seafood - Seafish role

Definition
Social responsibility is paramount to Seafish and to the entire seafood industry. For us social responsibility, encompasses concerns about labour and human rights issues. This includes human trafficking, labour abuses, child labour, debt bondage, forced labour, migrant workers, and slavery, across the whole supply chain. Social responsibility is a complex, global issue affecting many countries and a wide range of products.

Focus on the seafood supply chain
Since approximately 2006, various concerns regarding abuses of workers engaged in the seafood industry have steadily attracted more attention, from the media and civil society advocacy groups. The main concern has been the coercive treatment of certain categories of both sea and land-based workers, through abusive labour and recruitment practices variously referred to as slavery or slavery-like practices, forced and bonded labour, human trafficking, as well as serious forms of child labour.

There are growing concerns regarding unethical practices within the global seafood market, with several high profile cases of human rights abuse featured in the media. These have highlighted the need for transparency in the fisheries sector across the whole value chain, from persons consuming the fish back to the fishers who produced or captured it.

Since summer 2014 Seafish has become actively engaged in this area and has introduced a series of work areas to help the industry achieve the goal of eliminating unethical practices from UK seafood supply chains. These work areas have been agreed by Seafish’s three Sector Panels, and demonstrate the commitment the UK seafood industry has made to move forward on this issue.

Key work areas
• Outreach
• Seafood Ethics Common Language Group
• Assessment of ethical issues in the UK supply chain
• Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS)
• Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS)

Outreach
Seafish is working with stakeholders and attending key events, such as the Seafood Summit and the Boston Seafood Show in the US, and various stakeholder events in the UK, addressing modern slavery issues to learn about other initiatives, explain what the UK seafood industry is doing and to raise awareness of Seafish work streams. This is paying dividends with significant interest in RFS in the UK and globally. There are also opportunities to collaborate with US organisations to consolidate messages on how ethical issues can be addressed in the global supply chain, as well as plans for a Seafood Ethics Conference in late-2015.

There is considerable interest in the work that Seafish and the UK seafood industry is doing.
Seafood Ethics Common Language Group

Following media reports in 2014 there was significant interest from the seafood industry and other stakeholders working in this area to collaborate on a way forward. Whilst ethical issues had previously been addressed by the Seafish Common Language Group (CLG) over the years, in July 2014, Seafish formed the Seafood Ethics CLG, as a focused group to look specifically at ethical issues. This group has brought together key stakeholders, including major supermarket chains, smaller retailers, processors, suppliers, NGOs, Government, development organisations and charities, to facilitate information and knowledge exchange, to establish a common understanding of the issues and agree on future action.

News alerts are circulated at least twice a month to a current circulation list of around 145. There is a dedicated webpage for the group and two industry briefing documents have been produced: Thailand/warm water prawns; and The legal framework for working on UK fishing vessels, with more planned.

Seafish has held two meetings: in July 2014 and January 2015. The aim is to engage and share knowledge with organisations globally, to identify best practice in other countries, strengthen the key messages and have a wider impact.

A Home Office representative attended the January meeting to discuss the progress of the Modern Slavery Bill (MSB), in particular the new clauses on transparency in supply chains and providing law enforcement officers with additional powers when investigating modern slavery offences at sea.

The members of the Seafood Ethics CLG will also help inform ongoing and future Seafish work in this area.

Contact Karen Green for further information. (see panel on last page)
Assessment of ethical issues in the UK supply chain

We are currently undertaking a research project to assess the ethical issues impacting on seafood species landed into, and imported to the UK. This will cover all country suppliers to the UK seafood market, as well as domestic landings; wild caught and farmed species; different sectors of the supply chain; and all aspects of unethical practice. The work is due to commence early March 2015 and finish by the end of July 2015.

The contract has been awarded to Roger Plant. Roger has considerable experience of working with industry groups and companies, advising them on ways to prevent and remediate forced labour and trafficking in their company activities and supply chains. He is the former head of the ILO Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL) which focussed on forced labour and human trafficking, and he is currently chair of FLEX (Focus on Labour Exploitation). He has also delivered training programmes to several government agencies and civil society groups on forced labour and the fishing industry.

The information generated by this project will feed into the development of the second phase of the Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood, and into the ongoing development of the Responsible Fishing Scheme.

Contact Michaela Archer for further information. (see panel on last page)

Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS)

We have also developed a fisheries risk assessment tool (known as RASS) that will help buyers make an informed judgement on the risks they face when sourcing seafood. RASS provides information on the main species of seafood of importance to the UK market. It is a tool that will feature a wide range of information and data to enable seafood buyers to make informed sourcing decisions, and develop responsible sourcing strategies. It will also contribute to the resilience of the industry by providing accurate environmental data that can be used to help increase understanding and formulate informed responses to incorrect claims. Furthermore, the scope of data available will provide a gap analysis to inform priorities in fishery management and improvement programmes.

The existing profiles focus on the environmental impact of wild fisheries. The planned developments will incorporate ethical and welfare factors and farmed seafood. RASS is available online.

Contact Alex Caveen for further information. (see panel on last page)
Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS)
The Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) is a voluntary vessel-based programme certifying high standards of crew welfare and responsible catching practices on fishing vessels.

Established in 2006, the scheme underwent a complete review in 2014 and is being formally re-launched mid-2015. The revised RFS (which has been modified in accordance with the requirements of an internationally recognised ISO accredited standard) will feature two vessel standards - the RFS Crewed Vessel Standard and the RFS Single Handed Vessel Standard. Both of these incorporate social responsibility requirements.

The 2015 re-launch of the scheme will also feature the addition of a Chain of Custody standard, with major UK supermarkets and foodservice sector suppliers having made commitments to feature the RFS scheme within both their UK and International sourcing policies.

The RFS will enable seafood buyers to source seafood that has been independently certified as having been harvested, handled and processed to industry-agreed best practice standards, on vessels where crew health, safety and welfare, as well as quality and environmental impact, are of paramount importance.

All the latest information can be found on the Seafish RFS webpage; this includes a Guide to RFS, a short animation about the scheme as well as the RFS Crewed Vessel Standard and the RFS Single Handed Vessel Standard.

The RFS is complementary to existing standards and Seafish are working with the UK supply chain and eNGOs to raise awareness of the modified standards. We are also looking at the potential for an RFS Improver Programme to enable developing regions to establish a measurable approach to demonstrating improvements in responsible catching practices and crew welfare on fishing vessels. We are looking for partners and funding to develop guidelines and pilot this process with an aim of establishing a framework for a Social Fishery Improvement Programme (FIP) that can be used in isolation or alongside an Environmental FIP.

Contact Helen Duggan for further information. (see panel below)