

## THAILAND PROFILE

### **Main seafood products and exports**

Thailand has one of the world's largest fish and seafood industries. Some 90% of its production is exported, accounting for some 4% of all exports.

In 2013 Thailand exported approximately US\$ 7 billion worth of fish and seafood, a decrease of 13.4% from the previous year. The principal export products by value were tuna (US\$ 2.6 billion), prepared and preserved shrimps and prawns (US\$ 1.1 billion), frozen shrimp and prawns (US\$ 895.9 million), frozen cuttlefish and squid (US\$ 314.1 million), and sardines/sardinella/brisling (US\$ 234.5 million). Top export destinations were the U.S. (22.8%), Japan (20.4%), Australia (5.4%), Canada (4.4%) and the UK (3.9%).<sup>1</sup>

Aquaculture now dominates shrimp production, accounting for some 80% of all production. Intensive industrialisation has permitted annual production of over half a million metric tonnes from some 25,000 farms. Most shrimp aquaculture is family-owned or small business, though very large-scale enterprises also exist. The most prominent is Charoen Pokphand Food Public Company (CP Foods), a vertically integrated company comprising feed manufacturers, stock farms and factories, and processing plants. The shrimp processing industry has more than 150 freezing plants and 50 canning plants, mainly concentrated around the port of Samut Sakhon. The Thai Frozen Foods Association (TFFA) plays an important role in shrimp exports. To gain access to international markets, all producers and exporters need to be registered with TFFA, which now represents the interests of over 300 processors and traders.

Thailand is the main tuna exporter on the world market, with a global market share of over 40%. Canned tuna accounts for over 90%, though fresh and frozen tuna for the sashimi market are caught by long line vessels. The tuna canning industry is dominated by a few large companies (particularly by Thai Union, with a market share of some 37%)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Seafood exports to the UK**

In 2014, the UK imported UK£ 111,846,229 of seafood products from Thailand, a total of some 20,575,000kg. By value, the most important species were: warm water shrimps and prawns (£ 43,944,826); tuna (£ 34,500,117); prepared and preserved shrimps and prawns (£29,975,906); crabs (£1,641,260); cod (£ 909,055); salmon (£ 448,454); and mackerel (£ 426,511).

### **Employment in seafood**

It is estimated that the seafood industry in Thailand provides either direct or indirect employment for over 650,000 workers. In freshwater aquaculture alone, over 400,000

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<sup>1</sup> Data taken from "Inside Thailand – The Fish and Seafood trade", Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, June 2015. <http://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/industry-markets-and-trade/statistics-and-market-information/by-region/southeast-asia/inside-thailand-the-fish-and-seafood-trade/?id=1433861767469>

<sup>2</sup> K.S. Kuldilock, P.J. Dawson and John Lingard, "The export competitiveness of the tuna industry in Thailand", British Food Journal, Vol. 115, No. 3, 2013, pp. 328-341. [http://www.academia.edu/8554699/The\\_export\\_competitiveness\\_of\\_the\\_tuna\\_industry\\_in\\_Thailand](http://www.academia.edu/8554699/The_export_competitiveness_of_the_tuna_industry_in_Thailand)

people are employed in fish farms and related industries (such as feed suppliers, distributors and fish traders). Some 78,000 people work in brackish water aquaculture, and 184,000 in processing plants and related industries. It is estimated that about a third of these employed in the sector are women, particularly in activities related to feed preparation, feeding, harvesting, processing, accounting and marketing (International Labour Organisation (ILO) figures, 2012<sup>3</sup>). The tuna industry is estimated to provide employment for some 40,000 people.

A feature of employment in the Thai seafood industry, both at sea and on land, has been the participation of large numbers of migrant workers from neighbouring countries, particularly Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Many of these are irregular migrants, who either cross the border of their own volition or are recruited through labour brokers. It was officially estimated in 2015 that 71,132 migrants are working in sea fisheries.

### **Human trafficking and forced labour indicators, ranking and reports**

Thailand is ranked Tier 3 (the lowest tier) in the US Government's 2015 Trafficking in Persons<sup>4</sup> (TIP) report, which addresses the seafood sector in considerable detail. It observes that a significant portion of labour trafficking victims within Thailand are exploited in commercial fishing and fishing-related industries, among others. "Thai, Burmese, Cambodian and Indonesian men are subjected to forced labour on Thai fishing boats; some men remain at sea for several years, are paid very little or irregularly, work as much as 18 to 20 hours per day for seven days a week, or are threatened and physically beaten. Some victims of trafficking in the fishing sector were unable to return home due to isolated workplaces, unpaid wages, and the lack of legitimate identity documents or safe means to travel back to their home country. Some Thai men are subjected to forced labour on Thai fishing boats that travel throughout Southeast Asia and beyond.

The TIP report cites media sources in 2013 reporting corrupt Thai civilian and military officials profited from selling Rohingya asylum seekers from Burma and Bangladesh into forced labour on fishing vessels. The government investigated ship owners, captains, and brokers for labour trafficking in the commercial fishing industry in four cases related to Ambon Island, each with multiple perpetrators, and identified 32 Thai fishermen who were forced to work on Thai fishing vessels in Indonesia. The report mentions that the government has passed a new Fisheries Act to replace a 1946 law, which requires better registration and monitoring of vessels and inspection of workers' documents and working conditions. There are ample recommendations in the 2015 TIP report with one specific reference to the fishing or seafood sector: increase training for marine police and navy to detect and stop human trafficking at sea.

The U.S. Department of Labor lists both fish and shrimp in Thailand, in its December 2014 list of goods produced through forced or child labour.

<sup>3</sup> "Thailand's Shrimp and Seafood Industry – a World Leader", ILO brochure, August 2012.

<sup>4</sup> United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>

The Walk Free Foundation ranks Thailand No. 44 (a relatively poor ranking) in its 2014 *Global Slavery Index*<sup>5</sup>, with an estimated 475,300 persons (0.7% of the total population) in modern slavery. The index contains a study on Thailand, which makes specific reference to modern slavery in the fishing industry. Among the seven recommendations to either government or business, two focus specifically on fishing and seafood. The government is urged to “investigate cases of labour exploitation in the fishing industry and actively prosecute Thai labour brokers and officials found complicit in human trafficking for forced labour”. Businesses importing Thai seafood products, including sub-contractors multiple tiers deep, should conduct in-depth supply chain mapping exercises to identify product origin.

Ethical issues, labour and human rights in the Thai seafood industry have received extensive international attention in recent years. This review gives separate brief consideration to reports by international organisations, NGO reports, and media reports.

### Reports by international organisations

Two detailed reports have been published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ILO respectively. Both review the laws and regulatory framework, and document individual cases of abuse.

The IOM study, issued in 2011<sup>6</sup>, contains a thorough review of recruitment practices, together with abusive living and working conditions. The ILO study, first published in 2013<sup>7</sup>, presents the findings of a large-scale survey of employment practices and working conditions within the commercial fishing sector in the four major port areas of Thailand. The survey, of almost 600 fishers on Thai boats fishing in national and international waters, was collected through interviewing fishers onshore (thus not fully capturing the experience of fishers working in exploitative conditions at sea). Cambodians made up the majority of respondents in two of the provinces, and Myanmar migrants in the other two. Over 80% of the respondents were short-haul fishers, at sea for less than a month. Only a small fraction had work permits or had entered the regularisation process.

Both the IOM and ILO studies concluded that serious abuses are most likely to occur in long-haul fishing. A quarter of the long-haul fishers covered by the ILO survey had been subjected to coercive or deceptive labour practices. An annex to the ILO report presented key findings of a survey of members of the National Fisheries Association of Thailand. The main problems identified were deceptive brokers, unfair wages and serious violence on board fishing vessels.

<sup>5</sup> Global Slavery Index 2014 [http://d3mj66ag90b5fy.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Global\\_Slavery\\_Index\\_2014\\_final\\_lowres.pdf](http://d3mj66ag90b5fy.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Global_Slavery_Index_2014_final_lowres.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *Trafficking of Fishermen in Thailand*, prepared by Phil Robertson, IOM, Bangkok, January 2011. <https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/activities/countries/docs/thailand/Trafficking-of-Fishermen-Thailand.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Employment practices and working conditions in Thailand's fishing sector*, Asian Research Centre for Migration, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, ILO TRIANGLE Project, 2014. [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms\\_220596.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_220596.pdf)

### NGO reports

Since 2013 the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) has published several reports on Thailand, backed by well produced video films and other campaign materials. A first report in early 2013 addresses human trafficking in Thailand's fishing industry. Based on field investigations, it documents some extreme cases of abuse affecting migrant fishers from Myanmar, one of whom claimed to have witnessed multiple murders. A report later that year focuses specifically on the Thai shrimp industry<sup>8</sup>, highlighting in particular labour abuses and human trafficking in the pre-processing factories otherwise known as "peeling sheds".

A further EJF report published in March 2015<sup>9</sup> addresses the linkages between IUU fishing, over fishing and labour abuse. A strong business case is put forward for better practice, arguing that Thailand's fishing industry could double its revenue if sustainably managed.

### Media reports

Since mid 2014, three media reports on the Thai seafood industry have had a particularly high international profile.

The UK *Guardian* newspaper reports of June 2014<sup>10</sup>, which combines field reporting with analysis of the workings of the Thai seafood industry, had a major impact on public opinion and the seafood industry in the UK. The newspaper named specific UK, US and European retailers as having prawns produced under coercive practices in their supply chains. It focused in large part on the Thai conglomerate CP Foods, claiming that this company bought fishmeal from suppliers that owned, operated or bought from fishing boats "manned with slaves". The newspaper subsequently elicited statements from several of the major buyers and retailers, as to what they were doing to recognize and remedy the problems. This *Guardian* article appears to have had significant influence on future behaviour by companies. The fact that in the same month Thailand was demoted to Tier 3 on the U.S. Government's anti-trafficking ranking was certainly an added catalyst, instigating the Thai government to take new measures in cooperation with the seafood industry.

A second major article was published by Associated Press (AP) in late March 2015<sup>11</sup>. The article focuses on the Indonesian island village of Benjina and its surrounding waters, where AP claims to have interviewed more than 40 "current and former slaves" from Myanmar in a year-long investigation. It documented the journey of a single large shipment of "slave-caught seafood" from this Indonesian village –

<sup>8</sup> *The Hidden Cost: Human Rights Abuses in Thailand's Shrimp Industry*, EJF, September 2013. [http://ejfoundation.org/sites/default/files/public/shrimp\\_report\\_v44\\_lower\\_resolution.pdf](http://ejfoundation.org/sites/default/files/public/shrimp_report_v44_lower_resolution.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Pirates and Slaves: How Overfishing in Thailand Fuels Human Trafficking and the Plundering of Our Oceans*, EJF, March 2015. [http://ejfoundation.org/sites/default/files/public/EJF\\_Pirates\\_and\\_Slaves\\_2015.pdf](http://ejfoundation.org/sites/default/files/public/EJF_Pirates_and_Slaves_2015.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Kate Hodal, Chris Kelly and Felicity Lawrence, "Revealed: Asian slave labour producing prawns for supermarkets in US, UK" *The Guardian*, 10 June 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/10/supermarket-prawns-thailand-produced-slave-labour>

<sup>11</sup> The article "Slave-labour fish mixes in with Thai catch" was published in full in the Bangkok Post on 26 March 2015. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/508855/slave-labour-fish-mixes-in-with-thai-catch>

including squid, snapper, grouper and shrimp – and tracked it by satellite to a Thai harbour. AP journalists then followed the trucks that loaded and drove the seafood to dozens of factories, cold storage plants and the country's biggest fish market. Inside the plants in Samut Sakhon, representatives told AP journalists that they sold seafood to other Thai processors and distributors. The report named a number of US and Thai companies (including Thai Union) as using suppliers tainted by slavery-like practices. It elicited a swift response from the Thai government, as well as an immediate statement from Thai Union that it would disassociate from the supplier mentioned.

Further *Guardian* reporting, in July 2015, focused on the plight of Rohingya migrants from Myanmar, who were sold to Thai fishing vessels.

### **Ratification of international human rights and labour instruments**

#### **United Nations treaties and procedures**

Thailand has ratified the major international human rights instruments of the UN system. These include, with their date of ratification by Thailand:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1985)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (2003)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2007)

#### **International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions<sup>12</sup>**

Thailand is a founding member of the ILO, has ratified 15 ILO Conventions, but only three of its eight core human rights Conventions. It has not ratified either of the two instruments on forced labour, or those on freedom of association and collective bargaining. In recent years Thailand has received substantial technical assistance from the ILO, on issues including child labour in the shrimp industry, and the protection of migrant workers in the fishing industry.

### **Fisheries policy and administration: recent developments**

The Thai Department of Fisheries (DOF), in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, is the principal government agency responsible for development and management of fisheries and aquaculture in Thailand. The law and policy framework is now evolving rapidly, not least in response to the international criticism of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and labour abuse, and this section focuses only on recent developments as relevant to labour conditions in the seafood industry.

In April 2014, DOF launched an action plan for improving working conditions in Thai fisheries<sup>13</sup>. Three crucial activities are highlighted at the policy level, namely:

<sup>12</sup> The International Labour Organization's Fundamental Conventions  
[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_norm/--declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_095895.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_norm/--declaration/documents/publication/wcms_095895.pdf)



operational guidelines on Port in – Port out inspection for fishing vessels operating in international waters; development of good labour practices (GLP) for the fishing and processing industry; and the establishment of Labour Coordination Centres. Further measures approved in 2012 and 2013 included: the development of guidelines for the installation of a vessel monitoring Systems (VMS) on vessels operating in international waters; and the development of a Hazardous Work List in the shrimp and seafood industry for young workers between 15-17 years of age.

The DOF action plan describes in some detail the measures already being undertaken, often in cooperation with such international organizations as the ILO, or such national agencies as the Thai Frozen Foods Association (TFFA), the National Fisheries Association of Thailand (NFAT) and the Thai Overseas Fisheries Association (TOFA). Examples include the survey and registration of primary processing shrimp and seafood enterprises; and development of a system for documentation and registration of fishing vessels and crews. Since 2010, for example, a joint effort of DOF and the Marine Department established Mobile Units in the 22 coastal provinces, to conduct vessel registration and licence issuing activities. Over 34,000 fishing vessels had been brought into the process of registration over the past four years, meaning that the Thai Government could now identify almost 50,000 legal or registered fishing vessels.

As reported elsewhere<sup>14</sup>, importance has been attached to registering large fishing vessels of more than 30 gross tonnes, especially those operating beyond Thailand's territorial waters. These are considered to be at-risk venues as they require a large number of workers and crews in their long haul operations. By the end of 2014, out of 46,722 vessels registered since 2007, 8,270 were of more than 30 gross tonnes.

In the course of 2014, a number of government regulations were adopted on specific aspects. A Ministerial Regulation on the Protection of Fishers was adopted in 2014. The Ministry of Labour adopted a Regulation to Protect Labour in the Sea Fishing Industry (B.E. 2557, 2014), designed to provide workers with better protection and working conditions. This covers, among other things: a minimum age of at least 18 years for workers on sea vessels; a minimum rest period of at least 10 hours; a labour contract signed with the consent of both parties; and 30 days minimum annual leave.

The government has also described measures to register and legalise irregular migrants, through 87 "One Stop Service Centres" in Bangkok and each of the country's provinces. As a result, during the possible registration period between June and October 2014, over 1.6 million migrant workers and their dependants were legally registered, and issued with temporary permits to work and stay in Thailand while awaiting national verification.

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<sup>13</sup> "Action Plan and Implementation by the Department of Fisheries in Addressing Labour Issues and Promoting Better Working Conditions in Thai Fisheries Industry", Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, April 2014. <http://www.fisheries.go.th/thgflp/files/actionPlanApril2014.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> "Thailand's 2014 Trafficking in Persons Country Report", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015. <http://www.thaiembassydc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Thailands-Trafficking-in-Persons-2014-Country-Report1.pdf>

Initiatives have also been taken by Thai seafood industry associations. For example, the National Fisheries Association of Thailand (NFAT) adopted a code of conduct in 2014, and commenced a training programme for its members on the code's provisions. The Thai Tuna Industry Association (TTIA) issued an information package on measures taken against labour abuse in early 2015<sup>15</sup>. This refers to the TTIA's own code of conduct on Ethical Labour Practice, covering such issues as: forced and child labour; health and safety; freedom of association and collective bargaining; discrimination; disciplinary practices; remuneration; and welfare and benefits.

On the basis of this work, preparations were made for a new Fisheries Law, updating the earlier 1947 legislation. The new Fisheries Act (B.E. 2558) was promulgated in the Government Gazette on 28 April 2015, meaning that it would come into force 60 days later on 27 June 2015. According to official sources, the new legislation improves official oversight of Thai fisheries to better reflect current industry realities, establishes a fisheries management scheme, and improves port-state measures in line with international standards.

Furthermore, a Command Centre for Combating Illegal Fishing, reporting directly to the Prime Minister, has been operational since May 2015. It is leading and coordinating the government's efforts to tackle IUU fishing, including the formulation and implementation of the National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing.

### **Remedial measures: industry partnerships in the seafood sector**

In response to the extensive documentation of serious labour abuses including forced labour and human trafficking in seafood supply chains – both foreign retailers and processors or suppliers, and their Thai suppliers – have taken a number of remedial measures. There has been a broad experience of partnerships, within the industry, between the industry and government organisations, and others involving international organisations and NGOs. While these have been innovative, the diverse partnerships have had different objectives and activities. Some have sought more than others to influence government policies. Others have given more emphasis to dealing with cases of individual abuse in a company's supply chain, and taking remedial action to protect or compensate the migrant worker. Others have sought to act as a bridge between work at the grassroots level, and the engagement of the government or industry-wide federations. Examples are provided here.

#### Good Labour Practices (GLP)

GLP has been pioneered by the ILO, originally as part of a U.S.-funded project on combating the worst forms of child labour in shrimp and seafood processing areas of Thailand, implemented between 2010-2015. The GLP programme was officially launched by the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare (DLPW), the DOF and representatives of the fisheries industry in September 2013. Under DLPW and DOF, a multi-stakeholder task force has been created to deliberate and report on GLP activities. It has been expanded over time, to include the representatives of workers'

<sup>15</sup> "Information on the Tackling of Human Trafficking Issues in the Thai Tuna Industry", TTIA, 29 January 2015.

<http://www.intrafish.com/incoming/article1406573.ece/BINARY/Information+on+the+Tackling+of+Human+Trafficking+Issue.pdf>

organisations, and seafood buyers as observers. In November 2014, a GLP Road Map was adopted for the 2015-2017 period. As reported by the ILO, the roadmap includes the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform; consolidation of the existing programme; expansion of the GLP to cover the entire supply chain; establishment of a complaints and remediation mechanism; and enhanced knowledge management and awareness raising.

Diverse compliance and good practice guidelines have been developed for different sectors, including fishing boats, aquaculture farms, primary processing workplaces, and processing or packaging factories. These GLP guidelines are backed up by a supportive training programme, aimed at assisting individual businesses to use them. The Department of Fisheries issued its own action plan in 2014, largely assisted by the GLP project. GLP has also engaged buyers through a reference group of seafood buyers located outside Thailand (a meeting was held in Madrid in March 2015, on the sidelines of another seafood event). A declared aim is to develop a GLP certification programme.

While international funding for the original GLP programme came to an end mid 2015, both the Government of Thailand and the ILO are now seeking to secure its continuation. To this effect, the ILO launched a public consultation with its stakeholders in July 2015, seeking to determine the next steps for the programme. Some of the salient points are as follows.

As for **governance and management**, while Government leadership was important, observer status would be expanded to include research foundations and institutions, and projects such as the Issara Project (see below). While informal buyer reference groups had been established in Europe and Australia, a buyer reference group would also be established in North America and possibly East Asia. Terms of reference would be adopted, giving details on the role and functions of these groups, and the contributions expected. Funding commitments would be made on at least an annual basis by Government, Thai industry associations and buyers, and would increasingly cover the costs of the programme.

As for **training**, GLP interventions have so far been most advanced in the factories and peeling sheds (with some confusion about such other sectors as vessels, feed mills and farms). The GLP Task Force would now address the entire supply chain (though application of the GLP model to fishing vessels would be configured to complement the Government's enforcement activity, and vessel owners and captains would receive training based on the NFAT code of conduct). Outreach to peeling sheds and vessels would be considerably enhanced. Responsibility of factories for GLP adherence, vis-à-vis their subcontracted peeling sheds and vessels, would be institutionalized.

As for **complaints mechanisms**, government mechanisms are not available to migrants, and especially irregular migrants. A mechanism would be established to receive and respond to complaints and requests for conciliation. This would need a common understanding of the need to establish a private mechanism, and what kind of complaints or disputes should be received. Serious abuses and crimes would be referred to the authorities.



As for **knowledge management**, a quarterly newsletter in Thai and English would be disseminated through the buyer reference groups, and posted online, covering GLP results, emerging good practices and lessons learned. Regular meetings (perhaps scheduled on the sidelines of industry exhibitions in Thailand and elsewhere) would convene international buyers, government officials and industry leaders for information sharing and broader dialogue.

### Project Issara

An initiative in Thailand, of particular importance to UK seafood buyers<sup>16</sup> and retailers, has been the Issara Project, originally linked to Anti Slavery International<sup>17</sup>. Its importance has been the commitment of the UK-based industry partners to practical action on the ground, detecting any abuses in the supply chain of their Thai suppliers, and seeking where possible to remediate any problems detected. In September 2014, a coalition of ten retailers and seafood importers, together with the IDH Sustainable Trade Initiative, joined forces to this effect. The first step of the pilot project was to engage top-tier Thai seafood exporters (including CP Foods, Kingfisher, Seafresh and Thai Union) to engage other local businesses in their supply chain, including aquaculture farms, fishmeal plants and fishing companies. The pilot project also included a Victim Support Fund. Project Issara appears to have successfully combined industry and buyer engagement with campaigning, from such organisations as Anti Slavery International and Walk Free.

The project appears to have been well received by international retailers and suppliers, presented as an alternative to social auditing. It has been seen as a pilot initiative, operating during its first year with a low budget of some US\$ 600,000. A small team of nationals from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar (all of them with previous experience in a regional UN project against human trafficking) conduct visits to the different premises, and engage extensively with migrant workers from their own countries.

The method is based on confidentiality. The project provides regular confidential reports on the overall human and labour rights situation and trends, and also individual reports on the specific supply chain of each participating company. While the project team can use its own discretion as to where mainly to focus its attention, the fact finding forms part of a dialogue with each the participating companies, allowing it to act as its “eyes and ears” on the ground. The Project Issara team also enjoys close relations with Thai NGOs (such as Stella Maris) working with migrant fishers in such important port areas as Songkhla and Samut Sakhon, and has engagement with local law enforcement authorities. In some cases, the project team can undertake its own initiatives together with NGOs to seek remediation, such as compensation for non-payment of wages. More serious cases of abuse may be presented to law enforcement authorities.

### Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force

A further initiative in Thailand, very much led by the seafood industry itself, has been the Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force (hence, the Task Force). This was

<sup>16</sup> Asda/Walmart, The Cooperative Food, CP Foods UK, Lyons Seafood, Marks and Spencer, Sainsburys, Sea-Farms, Tesco, Waitrose, Young's Seafoods.

<sup>17</sup> An update on Project Issara's activities was provided to the Seafish Ethics CLG in January 2015. [http://www.seafish.org/media/1338563/seafoodethicsclg\\_jan2015\\_projectissara.pdf](http://www.seafish.org/media/1338563/seafoodethicsclg_jan2015_projectissara.pdf)

originally pioneered by the Thai company CP Foods, after it was implicated by the *Guardian* reporting for purchasing shrimp feed from vessels using abusive labour practices.

Established in July 2014, the Task Force is now an international industry alliance including retailers, manufacturers, government and NGOs. It is tasked with ensuring that Thailand's seafood supply chain is free from illegal and forced labour through accountability, verification and transparency. It recognises furthermore that human rights issues and marine conservation problems are linked with IUU fishing, and sets its objectives on this understanding.

Overall objectives and achievements of the Task Force have been summarised in a progress report issued in May 2015<sup>18</sup>. It identifies three specific objectives, each with their own deliverables.

- Objective 1. Implement track and trace systems with international verification from feed mill to vessel. Deliverable: an independent, internationally recognised Feed Supply Chain Validation Programme for adoption by all.
- Objective 2. Drive Thai Port Codes of Conduct with international recognition. Deliverables: A successful VMS trial and roll out; a standard code of conduct model for Thailand, involving all ports, brokers and vessels; new fishery and labour law reform through lobby action.
- Objective 3. Drive FIPS in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea. Deliverables: Successful FIPs; FIP pre-assessment in Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea (business case, costings and suitable funding proposals leading to successful FIP programme implementation).

From the progress report, it is clear that the Task Force is working at different levels, from supply chain auditing through to advice on (and pressure for) policy reforms. Tracing products has been a key aspect of its work. An independent auditing group (UL from the Philippines) has been engaged to train company auditors, and develop a programme for detailed tracing of the feed supply chain. Participating companies have also shared with each other their traceability systems, and a standard reporting template has been prepared. Specific timeframes have been agreed up for an independent feed supply chain validation programme, covering different products in the supply chain (eg. tuna by March 2015, surimi by December 2015, and whole fish and its by-products by January 2016). The expectation is that an internationally recognized validation should be adopted by all Task Force participants, by early 2016.

The Task Force activities have involved close cooperation with the government, particularly the DOF, but also other agencies. The Government has apparently made commitments to work with the Task Force, in its audit activity of 66 ports and 458 vessels. The Task Force document states that it has conducted extensive research across the Americas and the EU into world leading vessel monitoring system (VMS)

<sup>18</sup> Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force: Overview and Progress Update- May 2015. [http://js.undercurrentnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SSSC-Task-Force\\_Overview-and-Progress\\_May-2015\\_Short\\_Master\\_180515-11.pdf](http://js.undercurrentnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SSSC-Task-Force_Overview-and-Progress_May-2015_Short_Master_180515-11.pdf)

technology, and that the findings have been presented to senior Government officials in the DOF and Marine Department. At the same time Task Force activities have also generated a series of requests to the Government, covering issues such as MCPD (Marine Catch Purchasing Document) certificates.

Finally, the Task Force has addressed the broader structural issues at the root of labour abuse in seafood production. An example is the difficult issue of labour brokers. The May 2015 progress report states that a Brokers' Code of Conduct for seafood and labour will be drafted by September 2015, and should be implemented in the first quarter of 2016.

### **Overall risk assessment**

Thailand remains a high risk country, as attested by its Tier 3 ranking in the US TIP report, the critical observations and unfavourable ranking in the Global Slavery Index, and the disturbing media reports of abuse of migrants on Thai vessels that continued to be published throughout 2015.

At the same time, Thailand clearly represents a unique opportunity for different stakeholders, including the seafood industry and government, to work together to seek a solution to the problems. Despite the continued international criticism, there is consensus that Thailand is a very open country. International as well as national NGOs can operate there freely. And the Thai media is free, often containing outspoken reports about human trafficking, forced labour and slavery-like practices.

The various partnerships described in this profile show how various partnerships, involving the seafood industry and others, are already working together in different ways to remediate problems. It is important that the various partnerships should avoid the risk of overlapping, and should also share pertinent information and resources with each other. It can also be important to differentiate the role of government from that of industry, for example with regard to law enforcement. It is however positive that the industry, with the support of NGO partners, is sharing international expertise with the government in order to support technical measures against IUU, as well as policy reforms. It is equally positive that problems detected through industry-led initiatives on the ground are generating specific requests to the government for improved policy reform and implementation, monitoring and oversight.

Continued due diligence through supply chains will be essential in Thailand, until policy reforms and law enforcement measures have had a real effect in addressing the severe exploitation of migrant workers, particularly at sea but also in some cases on land. As for broader policy measures and reforms to clean up supply chains it must always be remembered that, while Thailand accounts for a significant part of UK seafood imports, for Thailand the UK is a relatively small market compared with such countries as the U.S. and Japan. For these reasons, as apparently proposed for a next stage of the GLP programme, industry partnerships would be advised also to reach out to companies from these countries.

If carefully documented, the lessons learned from the Thai experience could be of considerable value in addressing the ethical aspects of seafood production and trade in other at-risk countries.

### For further information

- **United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2015**  
<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>  
The Department places each country in this Report onto one of four tiers, as mandated by the Trafficking Victims Prevention Act (TVPA). This placement is based more on the extent of government action to combat trafficking than on the size of the country's problem. The analyses are based on the extent of governments' efforts to reach compliance with the TVPA's minimum standards. Tier one is the best ranking and Tier 3 the worst.
- **Global Slavery Index 2014**  
[http://d3mj66ag90b5fy.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Global\\_Slavery\\_Index\\_2014\\_final\\_lowres.pdf](http://d3mj66ag90b5fy.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Global_Slavery_Index_2014_final_lowres.pdf)  
The Global Slavery Index estimates the prevalence of modern slavery country by country, the absolute number by population, how governments are tackling modern slavery, and what factors explain or predict the prevalence of modern slavery. Rankings range from 1 to 167 - with 1 the worst and 167 the best, in terms of the prevalence of the population in modern slavery. This is based on three factors: estimated prevalence of modern slavery by population, levels of child marriage and levels of human trafficking into and out of the country. This gives a 'weighted measure'.
- **The International Labour Organization's Fundamental Conventions**  
[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_095895.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_095895.pdf)  
Ratifications of fundamental Conventions and Protocols by country  
[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:10011:0::NO::P10011\\_DISPLAY\\_BY,P10011\\_CONVENTION\\_TYPE\\_CODE:1,F](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:10011:0::NO::P10011_DISPLAY_BY,P10011_CONVENTION_TYPE_CODE:1,F)

*This is an information service provided by Seafish for industry and key stakeholders. To the best of our knowledge this information is factually correct at the date of publication.*

### For further information contact:

Karen Green, Industry Issues and Communications, Seafish

E: [karen.green@seafish.co.uk](mailto:karen.green@seafish.co.uk)

T: 01480 431500

M: 07515 993499