

Seafood Ethics Action Alliance

*Meeting to discuss reports of human rights abuses in UK
fishing industry*

18th May 2022

SEAFOOD ETHICS
ACTION ALLIANCE



Agenda

- 11:00:** Welcome and Competition Statement
- 11:10:** High-level recap on the reports that have been released and associated media coverage
- 11:30:** Discussion of potential SEA Alliance next steps
- 11:50:** AOB and Close

Please feel
free to ask
any questions
or make any
comments in
the chat as
we go



Competition statement

We must at all times comply with the requirements of competition law throughout this meeting, including in any informal discussions. Accordingly, we must not engage in any conduct which is likely to have the effect of preventing, distorting or restricting competition. All participants at this meeting agree to adhere to these principles and acknowledge that failure to do so could have serious consequences in law. Please also respect the confidentiality of your relationships with both customers and suppliers. These ground rules should serve to protect us all from any inadvertent breach of competition law.





BRIEFING PAPER

A ONE WAY TICKET TO LABOUR EXPLOITATION

HOW TRANSIT VISA LOOPHOLES ARE
BEING USED TO EXPLOIT MIGRANT
FISHERS ON UK FISHING VESSELS

THIS BRIEFING IS FOR BOTH IMMIGRATION AND FISHERIES POLICYMAKERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM (UK). CURRENT RULES ARE RESULTING IN MIGRANT WORKERS IN FISHING BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, PAID POORLY AND, IN SOME CASES, BEING EXPLOITED AND ABUSED.

THE UK IS A G7 COUNTRY WHICH FIRMLY ALIGNS ITSELF WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW PROTECTING WORKER RIGHTS. YET FISHERS FROM OUTSIDE THE EEA FIND THEMSELVES BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY BY FISHING VESSEL OWNERS COMPARED TO BRITISH AND OTHER EUROPEAN FISHERS WORKING ALONGSIDE THEM IN THE INDUSTRY.

URGENT REFORM OF THE WAY THE SYSTEM WORKS IS NEEDED. SPECIFICALLY, WE NEED TO CLOSE THE TRANSIT VISA LOOPHOLE.





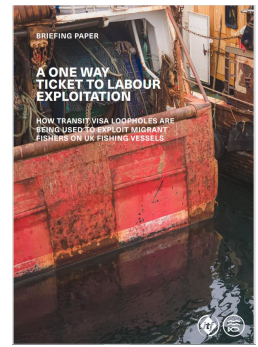
IMPACTS OF THE USE OF TRANSIT VISAS

- Immigration status is attached to individual vessels rather than the employers.
- A two-tier labour system – unequal pay for equal work.
- The hostile immigration environment puts migrant fishers at risk of exploitation
- The use of transit visas has been a proven tool for trafficking Ghanaians and Filipinos from the UK into the Republic of Ireland

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING MIGRANT FISHERS' WELFARE

- International conventions
- Failure to enforce the UK National Minimum Wage Act and contributions to National Insurance
- Failures of regulatory bodies in fishers' home countries





CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Move from transit visas to a revised skilled worker visa
- On UK flagged fishing vessels there should be a requirement to have a work permit/visa rather than a transit visa
- Regularise and harmonise the migrant journey from different labour sending countries
- Reporting and data collection on migrant fishers working in the UK
- Sponsorship and Tier 3 visa options to explore
- [A One Way Ticket to Labour Exploitation](#)





University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

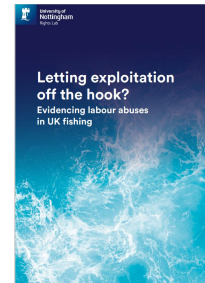
Letting exploitation off the hook?

Evidencing labour abuses
in UK fishing

“ These practices are compounded by ambiguous laws that are often interpreted differently by different actors. Without immediate change, the UK will continue to fail to meet its obligations and responsibilities under both international (ILO C188) and domestic law (Modern Slavery Act), but most importantly will continue to perpetuate inequalities between migrant and domestic fishers.

*Dr Jess Decker Sparks
Nottingham Research Fellow
and Rights Lab Associate
Director*





Letting exploitation off the hook? Evidencing labour abuses in UK fishing

Key findings include:

- **35 per cent of fishers reported experiencing regular physical violence** – with some workers recounting being racially abused or experiencing extreme sexual violence.
- **The average salary for migrant fishers working in the UK was £3.51 per hour** – well below the National Minimum Wage in the UK at £9.50 an hour.
- One participant, a UK national, told researchers: “I heard a vessel owner say. No – he proudly declared: I can get 2-3 foreign crew for the price of one of you local lads.”
- **19 per cent of participants reported conditions comparable to forced labour** with an additional 48 per cent reporting potential cases.
- Due to legal loopholes, non-European migrants with transit visas have no legal authority to “enter” the UK without permission when returning to port and are **forced to live on board the vessels**.
- Vessel owners and recruitment agencies are issuing work agreements that are **non-compliant with UK regulation, causing migrant fishers to be unduly treated as violators of UK immigration law** even when other parties are responsible for the illegal nature of their work.
- **More than 60 per cent of fishers (including UK nationals) said they would never report a grievance out of fear of blacklisting** - the practice of restricting re-employment opportunities for fishers.

the guardian

**Seascape: the state of
our oceans**
Workers' rights

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About this content

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Tue 17 May 2022 14.04 BST



Migrant workers 'exploited and beaten' on UK fishing boats

Report tells of 20-hour shifts for £3.50 an hour, racism and sexual
abuse under cover of transit visa loophole



📍 Fishing off Scotland. Migrant fishers on transit visas cannot enter the UK, so must live on the boats. Photograph: Keith Lloyd Davenport/Alamy

A third of migrant workers on UK fishing vessels who responded to a research survey work 20-hour shifts, and 35% reported regular physical violence, according to a new study that concludes there is rampant exploitation and abuse on British ships.

"Leaving is not possible because I'm not allowed off the vessel to ask for help," one migrant worker told researchers at the [University of Nottingham Rights Lab](#), which focuses on modern slavery. They found fishers reported working excessive hours, with few breaks, on an average salary of £3.51 an hour.

**Migrant
workers
'exploited and
beaten' on UK
fishing boats |
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Guardian**



Statement from Fishermen's Welfare Alliance

<https://www.sff.co.uk/statement-from-the-fishermens-welfare-alliance/>

Statement from Fishermen's Welfare Alliance on ITF report on fishermen's welfare

by editor | May 17, 2022 | Featured News, Latest News, Scottish Fishing News



The Fishermen's Welfare Alliance has issued a statement on the ITF report 'A One Way Ticket to Labour Exploitation' on fishermen's welfare

The Fishermen's Welfare Alliance has issued a statement on the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) report 'A One Way Ticket to Labour Exploitation' centred on migrant fishermen's welfare.

Elsbeth Macdonald, chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, speaking on behalf of The Fishermen's Welfare Alliance (FWA), said:

"We welcome the ITF's conclusion that the transit worker visa is not fit for purpose and does not meet the requirements of the UK's modern fishing industry.

"Those parts of the industry that employ non-UK fishermen through the transit visa system have been lobbying government for many years for improvements, and were successful in having fishermen recognised as skilled workers in the new immigration system, but other barriers mean this route cannot be used in the way that industry had hoped. We would welcome the opportunity to look at this in more detail with government, including the Home Office and Defra.



Search

Irish Fishing Master Register divisive and horrific says IS&WFPO Chief



Brendan Byrne of the IFPEA - a Department no longer fit for purpose



Recent Posts

More 'gagging' efforts of Irish fishing industry voices claims IFSA Chair

Truss' statement on NI Protocol not welcomed by the Scottish seafood sector

Seafish replies to Transit visas and migrant worker concerns in the UK fishing industry

Statement from Fishermen's Welfare Alliance on ITF report on fishermen's welfare

Call for Evidence launched to progress

Statement from the Seafarers Charity

The Seafarers' Charity stands ready to support migrant workers in UK fishing

MAY 17, 2022

The Seafarers' Charity stands ready to support migrant workers in UK Fishing

The Seafarers' Charity has been shocked at the findings of new research published by the University Of Nottingham Rights Lab which reveals evidence of poor treatment and lack of decent working conditions for some migrant workers on UK fishing vessels.

The research report '[Letting Exploitation off the Hook? Evidencing Labour Abuses in UK Fishing](#)' has been published this week by the University of Nottingham Rights Lab.

The researchers sought out views of fishing crew and heard directly from them about what it is really like to work within the UK fishing industry. Increasing difficulties in recruiting UK fishing crew means that many workers are recruited from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) such as the Philippines and Ghana and can experience very different working conditions and practices to their UK colleagues.

'We have been shocked and saddened at the working conditions and treatment of migrant fishing crew revealed in this new research.

The Seafarers' Charity champions the safety and wellbeing of all who work at sea. I am sure that many people, including owners of fishing businesses and other stakeholders, will share our concerns about the treatment of migrant workers in the UK fishing industry.

We stand ready, as a grant funder, to play our role in supporting improvements in the working conditions and treatment of migrant workers in the UK fishing industry and we call on others involved in UK fishing to act swiftly to stamp out the abhorrent treatment of migrant workers and prevent the risk of such poor practices ever becoming accepted in UK fishing.'

- Catherine Spencer, Chief Executive Officer of The Seafarers' Charity





Seafish response

[Transit visas and migrant worker concerns in the UK fishing industry \(seafish.org\)](#)

Transit visas and migrant worker concerns in the UK fishing industry

This week has seen the publication of two reports raising concerns about transit visas and migrant worker welfare. Here is our response.

On Monday The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) published a briefing paper suggesting that transit visa loopholes are being used to exploit migrant fishers on UK fishing vessels. On Tuesday The University of Nottingham published a report on working conditions across the UK fishing fleet which raises concerns about the treatment of migrant workers.

In response, our Director of Operations Aoife Martin said:

"We are committed to supporting a socially responsible seafood industry and do not condone the unfair treatment of crew on fishing vessels. Any mistreatment or abuse of fishing crew, regardless of nationality, should be condemned outright, and when abuses are uncovered then the individuals responsible should be dealt with appropriately. The safety and welfare of fishing crews while at sea is of paramount importance.

"We are aware of previous issues with poor treatment of crew amongst certain vessel operators, but we also know that the industry as a collective has made inroads in identifying and addressing the factors that lead to this type of behaviour. Whilst the welfare issues raised in the University of Nottingham report are not reflective of every fishing vessel in the UK, the findings are concerning and highlight there is still work to do. We are committed to working across industry and with government to ensure that the UK fishing sector is an exemplar in what a fishing industry should look like.



An upcoming campaign

How To Achieve Decent Working Conditions and Prevent Labour Abuse



The International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention No. 188 (ILO C188) is designed to protect the safety and welfare of all engaged in fishing – whether they be owners, share fishers or contracted crew.

The Seafarers' Charity is calling for Government, the fishing industry and trade unions to work together to ensure that this existing legislation is enforced and upheld for everyone working within the UK fishing industry to ensure decent working conditions now, and, for future generations.

The Seafarers' Charity, a grant funder of maritime welfare, is concerned about the safety and welfare of all who work at sea, and the reported treatment of migrant workers in UK fishing. The Charity will shortly publish a full response to the University of Nottingham Rights Lab research report which will contain proposed solutions and recommendations aimed at achieving Fairness in Fishing.



Timeline

1 March 2022: Presentation of Waitrose survey on the experiences of crew on Scottish fleets.

16 May 2022: Release of ITF Report *A One Way Ticket to Labour Exploitation*

17 May 2022: Release of Nottingham University Report *Letting Exploitation off the Hook?*

24 May 2022: Extended Seafood Ethics Common Language Group meeting to present and discuss both reports.

June 2022?: Launch of Fairness in Fishing Campaign

5 July 2022: Seafood Ethics Common Language Group in person meeting in London for further discussion



Discussion of potential next steps for the SEA Alliance

Considerations:

- Safeguarding of vulnerable workers – are there any immediate steps that can be taken?
- How do we ensure substantive and timely improvement and remediation of issues.
- What role should SEA Alliance play in any Govt. advocacy on the issue of transit visas?

