

# Social responsibility in seafood - Seafish role

April 2019

This factsheet provides an overview of how Seafish is helping the seafood industry to address issues relating to labour and worker welfare.

---

## Why social responsibility matters

Social responsibility is paramount to the seafood industry; it is defined as the need for businesses to balance profit-making with activities that benefit society, and to develop a positive relationship to the society in which they operate. In the past 20 years, the seafood industry has focussed on sustainability and responsible sourcing in the widest sense. In the past five years attention has switched to concerns about labour and human rights issues which has directly influenced Seafish's work.

## Social responsibility and seafood

The discussion around social responsibility in fisheries and seafood sparked in 2014, when high-profile journals published exposés uncovering modern slavery, human trafficking, child labour and other egregious human rights abuses occurring in different fisheries around the world. This was a major catalyst for convening representatives from across academia, human rights and environmental non-profit organizations and the seafood industry to tackle these issues. Seafish has been actively engaged in this process.

This complex issue encompasses concerns about labour and human rights issues, it affects many countries and a wide range of products and it challenges the reputation of the seafood sector. This issue is too big and too complex for any individual company or organisation to tackle on its own.

Seafish's work is directed at helping industry to understand what a business commitment to socially responsible seafood means in practice. Our primary focus is to ensure that the industry has access to relevant guidance material, business risk assessment tools and best practice examples so that businesses are equipped to make the right decisions. Our key work areas are:

- The Seafood Ethics Common Language Group (SECLG) which brings the seafood industry and other stakeholders together to share information and develop and improve collective understanding of how ethical issues can be addressed across the supply chain.
- Helping the seafood supply chain understand the landscape of risk assessment information sources, tools and methodologies.

- Producing country profiles that detail the social risks in regions supplying to the UK market. These profiles are aimed at informing purchasing decisions in seafood businesses. Fifteen profiles have been produced to date.
- Supporting seafood businesses to comply with UK Modern Slavery legislation.
- Developing and maintaining the Tools for Ethical Seafood Sourcing (TESS) to signpost stakeholders to resources that can help businesses manage and reduce the risks associated with labour issues and worker welfare in seafood supply chains.
- Developing and implementing the Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) which certifies vessels against agreed standards of crew welfare and responsible catching practices.
- Developing and implementing the Responsible Fishing Ports Scheme which sets standards for good operational practices within UK fishing ports and harbours, including the welfare of fishing port workers.
- Producing and disseminating briefings to improve seafood industry awareness of ethical issues across the supply chain and the latest initiatives to address these issues.

## Seafish activities

**Information and guides**  
**Country / region profiles**



**Seafood Ethics Common Language Group**  
**SEA Alliance**  
**Fishermen's Welfare Alliance**

**Responsible Fishing Scheme**  
**Responsible Fishing Ports Scheme**  
**Tools for Ethical Seafood Sourcing (TESS)**

## Communicating through the Seafood Ethics Common Language Group

With human rights abuses in the global seafood industry attracting international attention in 2014 there was significant interest from the industry and other stakeholders working in this area to collaborate on a way forward. In response Seafish formed the Seafood Ethics Common Language Group as our prime forum for collaboration.

The Seafood Ethics CLG provides an integrated and interdisciplinary platform to share information, improve understanding and create opportunities for further collaboration on ethical and social issues relating to responsible seafood production. Seafish manages this group to foster open and honest dialogue. The group convenes seafood stakeholders including major supermarket chains, smaller retailers, processors and catching sector representatives throughout the whole supply chain, with government, NGOs, development organisations and charities in a 'safe' environment.

To build on the work of the Seafood Ethics CLG the Seafood Ethics Action Alliance (SEA Alliance) has been established by seafood businesses to provide a platform for industry to agree best practice solutions to address ethical issue in the supply chain and to enable pre-competitive action. Seafish provides the Secretariat for the SEA Alliance.

Seafish also provides Secretariat support to the Fishermen's Welfare Alliance which is an initiative established by the UK catching sector to assist the fishing industry to meet the requirements of the Work in Fishing Convention and the Modern Slavery Act; and to provide a forum for industry to consider and address issues relating to the availability of labour. The FWA includes representatives from across the supply chain.

[www.seafish.org/article/the-seafood-ethics-common-language-group](http://www.seafish.org/article/the-seafood-ethics-common-language-group)

## Supporting the supply chain

The Seafish approach to promote responsible sourcing across the supply chain is to inform, improve understanding and develop capability within the seafood sector. Seafish is working with the industry to identify where there are risks and how to address them.

### **A shared understanding**

We have produced a series of guides and briefings to help improve knowledge of the issues and how to address them. Guides are aimed at developing a shared understanding and to avoid misinformation across the supply chain. Recent examples include guidance on the legal framework that permits foreign workers to be employed on UK fishing vessels, and the support available to fishers working in UK waters.

### **Risk profiles**

Seafish has recently commissioned a critique of the available risk assessment information sources (such as the Trafficking in Persons Report), and risk assessment schemes and tools (such as the Food Network for Ethical Trade). This work is expected to provide critical insight, in a user-friendly format, on the underlying information that drives these schemes, how the risk metrics are derived, what they measure and the potential limitations. In 2015 Seafish produced a series of profiles covering 15 regions supplying into the UK seafood market. These profiles provided an overview of the key issues in these markets, the potential risks that exist and the factors that should be considered by business when sourcing product from those markets. These profiles will be updated in 2019.

### **Guidance on drafting a Modern Slavery statement**

To help the seafood industry better understand the reporting requirements under the Modern Slavery Act, Seafish produced guidance material on how to draft a Modern Slavery statement and also delivered an interactive workshop to provide direct support to businesses on what these statements should contain.

[www.seafish.org/article/ethics-in-seafood](http://www.seafish.org/article/ethics-in-seafood)



### Tools for Ethical Seafood Sourcing

Seafish's Tools for Ethical Seafood Sourcing (TESS) was launched in March 2017. The purpose of the tool is to signpost users to a range of useful resources to help businesses address issues in their supply chains.

There are many different sources of information available on ethical issues in the seafood supply chain and it can be challenging for seafood businesses to understand this complex landscape.

TESS helps companies address social responsibility challenges by providing: an overview of the ethical issues that can exist in the supply chain; a step by step approach to systematically tackle these issues; and a fully searchable database of information, initiatives, standards, organisations and other resources that will help support businesses to make improvements.

[www.seafish.org/tools-for-ethical-seafood-sourcing](http://www.seafish.org/tools-for-ethical-seafood-sourcing)



### Responsible Fishing Ports Scheme

In 2018, after extensive collaboration with the UK fishing ports sector and wider supply chain, Seafish launched the Responsible Fishing Ports Scheme (RFPS). The RFPS is a voluntary, independently audited, certified programme designed to demonstrate responsible food safety and good operational practices within UK fishing ports and harbours. The scheme has been developed to raise standards across the UK fishing ports sector. Included in the standard is a module on the 'working environment' which addresses the welfare of workers employed in fishing ports.

[www.seafish.org/article/responsible-fishing-ports-scheme](http://www.seafish.org/article/responsible-fishing-ports-scheme)



### Responsible Fishing Scheme

The Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) is a voluntary certification scheme that independently audits compliance on board fishing vessels to certify high standards of crew welfare and responsible catching practices on fishing vessels.

The Standard is independently audited against international accreditation criteria providing a transparent, robust and credible endorsement for seafood sourced from RFS certified members.

The RFS is complimentary to existing fishery and processing certification schemes and a growing number of major UK retailers, market leading processors and foodservice sector suppliers have made commitments to feature the RFS scheme within their sourcing policies.

Periodic reviews are part of good standards governance and work is underway to develop Version 2 of the RFS Standard. Following extensive consultation with UK seafood industry stakeholders the objectives, structure and scope for the next iteration of the Scheme have been agreed and published in the Terms of Reference.

The new Standard will be developed during 2019. Key changes proposed include streamlining the certification model to enhance accessibility, maximising the opportunity to scale up participation via the group certification model and enabling internationalisation of the Scheme.

All the latest information can be found on the Seafish RFS website, including a database of current certified vessels.

[www.seafish.org/responsible-fishing-scheme](http://www.seafish.org/responsible-fishing-scheme)

**Michaela Archer, Head of Insight**

e: [michaela.archer@seafish.co.uk](mailto:michaela.archer@seafish.co.uk)

**Helen Duggan, Head of RFS Transition**

e: [helen.duggan@seafish.co.uk](mailto:helen.duggan@seafish.co.uk)

**Karen Green, Industry Issues and Communications**

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

w: [www.seafish.org](http://www.seafish.org)