



December 19, 2016

BRIEFING ON GREENPEACE'S REPORT 'TURN THE TIDE' AND CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS' REPORT 'SEAFOOD SLAVERY: HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE INTERNATIONAL FISHING INDUSTRY'

TURN THE TIDE

Summary

In December 2016, Greenpeace released ['Turn the Tide'](#), a year-long investigation into human rights abuses and illegal fishing in Thailand's distant water fishing fleet. In the report, Greenpeace alleges that recent crackdowns on illegal fishing in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea forced offending vessels into the Saya de Malha bank area, a large, shallow, biodiverse tropical ecosystem. Due to inadequate enforcement in Saya de Malha – regulated by Mauritius and the Seychelles – Greenpeace claims that illegal fishing and human rights abuses have flourished.

Greenpeace monitored the activity of large refrigerated fishing vessels (also known as “reefers”) in Saya de Malha from 2015 to 2016. Greenpeace alleges that there, beyond enforcement, instances of illegal fishing, human rights, and labor abuses occur on vessels. Abuses documented by Greenpeace include 22 hour workdays, a lack of employment contracts, lying about the cost of documents such as passports, and other violations. Unfortunately, Greenpeace also found that – once the vessel returns to port in Thailand – inspections by the Royal Thai Navy may not adequately identify potential trafficking victims due to coercive tactics by senior crew on these vessels.

In addition to the aforementioned abuses, Greenpeace found other health risks present for fishers. The vessels monitored by Greenpeace are able to stay out at sea for months or years at a time in part due to transshipment, a practice in which a reefer supplies the vessel with food, fuel, and other supplies. As a result of this practice – which leads to a limited amount of food and nutritional diversity, as well as challenges with the re-supply schedule – Greenpeace reports that fishers were exposed to a vitamin B1 deficiency causing a disease called beriberi, which was responsible for the deaths and hospitalizations of crew.

Greenpeace also encountered human rights abuses aboard a Thai vessel catching commercial tuna. Many of these trafficking victims were subjected to deceptive recruiting practices, verbal abuse, restrictions on their freedom of movement, and even physical violence. To combat these abuses, Greenpeace recommends increased control or banning of transshipment practices, improved inspection processes and capacity building, and more rigorous traceability standards.

What does this mean for seafood businesses?

Beyond the human rights and fishing violations documented by Greenpeace, the report also found other issues in supply chains. Greenpeace claims that a few players in Thailand have an influence over much of the seafood industry as well as other sectors. They claim these players contribute to a “dirty” fishing industry, where business groupings (often families) exert their own interests.

Furthermore, the Greenpeace investigation implicated various U.S. businesses. ‘Turn the Tide’ found that certain Fancy Feast and Meow Mix products containing surimi produced by the offending fleet are sold by major U.S. retailers. Suppliers of major retailers were also implicated through imitation crab products. This problem is not limited to U.S. supply chains. Greenpeace associated the UK, Italy, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan with the tainted products as well.

Considerations for Companies

Given the systemic and entrenched problems documented in seafood supply chains, it is important to acknowledge where problems exist in order to better address them. Labor and supply chain improvement programs may provide a framework for businesses to implement standards through guidelines and supportive training programs that can improve social responsibility and protections for workers. However, voluntary schemes and accreditations by themselves are not sufficient in eliminating trafficking and forced labor in supply chains. Seafood companies should voice their public support for binding and fair government regulations and common, market-oriented standards throughout industry to build upon existing voluntary schemes.

Furthermore, major seafood buyers in the U.S. and EU should:

1. **Map it:** Request full traceability to the source to ensure products can be traced to their origins and names and addresses of all entities that handled the product can be identified. If a product is wild-caught this should include vessels. If farmed, this should include feed mills, fishmeal plants, farms, and vessels (catching wild product for feed).
2. **Analyze:** Conduct a risk assessment and focus work on areas of the highest risk.
3. **Pledge and track:** Ensure that each link in the supply chain makes a binding, documentable pledge to their customer to avoid all forms of labor abuse.
4. **Audit:** Support unannounced labor audits of all steps in the supply chain (including boats providing fishmeal for aquaculture species), as well as worker interviews. Audits should capture the extent to which recruitment companies and individuals that place workers within all levels of the seafood sector exceed basic compliance with local labor laws and can provide evidence that workers are free from debt bondage and are aware of their legal rights.
5. **Communicate with stakeholders:** Share concerns regarding human trafficking, labor violations, and the lack of monitoring of pre-processing facilities with vendors, then stipulate that continued procurement will be based on improvement by agreed-upon timelines.
6. **Communicate with consumers:** Provide clear, robust information to consumers on the origin of fisheries products (such as production location and method), and the actions taken to guarantee products are not connected to human rights abuses, labor violations, or environmental damage.
7. **Support improvements:** Participate in multi-stakeholder collaborations, such as the [Seafood Task Force](#), and support relevant policy to combat illegal fishing and human rights or labor abuses.

SEAFOOD SLAVERY: HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE INTERNATIONAL FISHING INDUSTRY

Considerations for the Government and Private Sector

A recent report by the Center for American Progress – [‘Seafood Slavery: Human Trafficking in the International Fishing Industry’](#) – provides a landscape of existing U.S. led initiatives and regulations that address human rights abuses, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in seafood products being imported into the United States. However, the report identifies issues that hamper the effectiveness and enforcement of these regulations and initiatives such as the compartmentalized focus of enforcement agencies, lack of funding, inconsistent standards, and lack of transparency. To resolve these issues, the report provides recommendations on how to leverage existing initiatives and regulations, such as increased transparency, funding, cooperation, and public-private sector partnerships. Additionally, the report highlights the link between illegal fishing and labor abuses and the need for the inclusion of labor issues in current anti-illegal fishing regulations and initiatives.

To learn more, please contact FishWise at info@fishwise.org.