



Guidelines for Addressing Labor Abuses in Seafood Supply Chains

The term “human trafficking” describes what is also known as human slavery or forced labor. Regardless of the label, the issue remains a serious one in many countries, but lately it is most notable in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand.

Workers forced into bondage on fishing boats who have managed to escape their captors have described horrifying conditions – working for hours without breaks, often spending months at sea with little or no pay. Anyone who complains is threatened, restrained, and sometimes beaten.

[The latest investigation by the Associated Press](#) shows the problem also exists in shrimp processing facilities on land, with workers – many of them children – sometimes kept under lock and key while they work to remove shells and organs from shrimp.

In many cases, shrimp and fish produced by slave labor is sold to unsuspecting distributors who sell worldwide to major retailers. Most of these buyers are unaware of the connection between their product and forced labor until a mass media investigation connects the dots.

What you can do

All buyers concerned about slave labor in the supply chain should take an active role in examining their suppliers, including the usual site visits, unannounced checks on labor conditions, and demands for traceability. In addition, SFP recommends the following:

Importers and distributors: Get involved in the Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force. This is an international industry alliance including leading retailers, manufacturers, government, and NGOs with the goal of ensuring Thailand’s seafood supply chain – in particular from fishing vessel to feed mill – is free from illegal labor through accountability, verification, and transparency. Contact SFP at info@sustainablefish.org to learn more. Suppliers can also join the SFP [Asia Reduction Fisheries Supplier Roundtable](#) or the [Farmed Shrimp Supplier Roundtable](#). These are SFP-led groups that help monitor the industry through fishery and aquaculture improvement projects and pre-competitive, collaborative activities such as control documents.

Retailers and other seafood buyers: You and your first-tier suppliers are in a unique position to have a real impact on forced labor in the seafood industry. Since SFP recommends first-tier suppliers get involved in SRs or the Shrimp Sustainable Supply Chain Task Force, retailers should reach out to their first-tier suppliers to encourage them to do so.

Learn more

For further information about human trafficking, reports are available from the [Environmental Justice Foundation](#) and [FishWise](#). Other media reports, [such as this one from the Associated Press](#), further describe just how serious this problem is, [along with what's being done](#) about the problem.