



Labour unions and civil society organisations call on the Royal Thai Government to halt rollbacks to the Fisheries Act and strengthen labour inspections of fishing vessels

Thailand has made significant progress in reforming its fisheries sector over recent years, turning an industry once known for human rights abuses and illegal and unsustainable fishing into a regional leader. However, insufficient implementation and enforcement of key labour rights legislation and proposals to roll back the legal progress already made, seriously threaten Thailand’s reputation as a global seafood supplier.

Compliance with the International Labour Organization’s Work in Fishing Convention (C188), despite being required under Thai law, remains a challenge for many Thai fishing vessels. C188 mandates critical provisions such as adequate food and clean drinking water onboard, sufficient hours of rest, on-time electronic payments, the right of crew to retain identity documents and a fully stocked first aid kit.

A [National Fisher Conditions Survey](#) conducted by the ITF Fishers’ Rights Network (FRN) earlier this year suggests widespread violations of international labour standards in the Thai fishing industry. The survey found that 99% of fishers are not paid monthly by bank transfer as the law requires, 87% owe money to their employers, indicating they are in debt bondage, and 84% have their documents retained by the vessel owner.

“Thai government authorities and PIPO inspectors are not effectively investigating violations or sanctioning wrongdoers. This failure undermines international confidence in Thai seafood. Despite Thailand ratifying C188 in 2019, the standards have not been adequately implemented or enforced. As a result, there has been an alarming rise in IUU fishing, labour rights violations, and an increase in fisher injuries and deaths,” said Jon Hartough, ITF Southeast Asia Regional Coordinator for the ITF Fisheries Section.

There are also growing concerns about potential rollbacks to the Fisheries Act, currently under review in Parliament. These proposed changes would undermine critical labour and environmental protections,

prioritising the interests of vessel owners over the rights of fishers and the sustainability of fish populations. While positive developments on the draft during the parliamentary drafting phase are recognised and welcomed by labour unions and civil society organisations (CSOs), to uphold transparency and public trust, it is crucial that the final draft of the Act be made public without delay.

The rollbacks that remain in the draft Fisheries Act risk exacerbating labour abuses, undermining the long-term sustainability of Thailand's lucrative seafood industry, and damaging the international reputation of Thai seafood. The threat of these rollbacks continues to loom over the legislative process given that the current Fisheries Act draft will now proceed to the Senate for further deliberation.

Labour groups and CSOs are now calling on the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to halt any remaining rollbacks, strengthen labour inspections and strictly enforce existing laws to ensure that Thai seafood is sourced free from forced labour and environmental degradation. These measures are vital to build trust and preserve Thailand's standing as a responsible seafood producer, as global markets increasingly demand evidence that seafood has been caught sustainably, legally and ethically.

"We are only just starting to see the tentative signs of recovery of Thai fisheries following important reforms. Rollbacks of these protections must be stopped if we are to have any chance of preserving Thai seafood resources for future generations," said Dominic Thomson from the Environmental Justice Foundation. "The government can build a lasting and robust legacy on fisheries and labour issues by working with small-scale fishers, labour and civil society organisations. This is especially important in the face of renewed pressure from segments of the industrial fishing sector calling for a weakening of environmental and human rights protections."

Labour groups and CSOs stand ready to collaborate closely with the RTG to address these challenges. Strengthening labour inspections and ensuring essential measures of the Fisheries Act are maintained will not only safeguard the rights of fishers but also enhance the transparency and accountability of Thailand's seafood supply chain. These measures are essential for reinforcing consumer and investor confidence, especially as global markets and emerging human rights and environmental due diligence laws increasingly demand ethical sourcing and sustainability.

Signatory:

1. Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates (AHLRA)
2. Be Slavery Free
3. Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)
4. Fisherman Labour Group (FLG)
5. Fishers' Rights Network (FRN)
6. Foundation for Education and Development (FED)
7. Global Labor Justice (GLJ)
8. Green World Foundation
9. IJM Foundation
10. International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)
11. Labour Protection Network (LPN)
12. Labour Rights Foundation (LRF)
13. Migrant Workers Federation (MWF)
14. Migrant Working Group (MWG)
15. Solidarity Center
16. SOS Earth
17. Women Workers for Justice Group (WJG)

NOTE TO EDITOR:

About the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF): EJF works internationally to inform policy and drive systemic, durable reforms to protect our environment and defend human rights. We investigate and expose abuses and support environmental defenders, Indigenous peoples, communities, and independent journalists on the frontlines of environmental injustice. Our campaigns aim to secure peaceful, equitable, and sustainable futures.

Our investigators, researchers, filmmakers, and campaigners work with grassroots partners and environmental defenders across the globe. Our work to secure environmental justice aims to protect our global climate, ocean, forests, wetlands, wildlife and defend the fundamental human right to a secure natural environment, recognising that all other rights are contingent on this. For more information or to speak to one of EJF expert analysts, please contact media@ejfoundation.org.

EJF is committed to combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing as well as associated human rights abuses in the fishing sector. EJF has worked in Thailand on these issues since 2014, engaging in a combination of in-depth independent investigations into these potential crimes, high-level advocacy with Royal Thai Government ministries and frontline enforcement observations of Thailand's fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance mechanisms.

About the ITF: The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is a global, democratic, affiliate-led movement of over 700 transport workers' unions recognised as the world's leading transport authority. We fight passionately to improve working lives; connecting trade unions and workers' networks from 150 countries to secure rights, equality and justice for their members. We are the voice of the nearly 16.5 million transport workers who move the world. (www.itfglobal.org).
ITF: Rosalyn Smith at media@itf.org.uk

About the Fishers' Rights Network: Set up by the ITF, the FRN is a democratic, representative union of fishers in Thailand which campaigns to improve the wages, working conditions and labour rights of all fishers in the Thai fishing industry. (www.justiceforfishers.org). FRN: frncoordinator.itf@gmail.com