

**GLOBAL
LABOR
JUSTICE**

Tuna supply chains show a pattern of forced labor. Enforceable agreements that include labor rights protections and Wi-Fi access for fishers are key to regulatory compliance.



A recent [study](#) commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that more than 100,000 fishers die each year to supply the seafood products sold by multinational grocery retailers.

Thousands more are denied basic rights, suffering severe injuries and sickness without medical care, subjected to excessive work hours, lacking access to sufficient food and water, and kept out at sea for a year or more. With no access to wi-fi on board, fishers are unable to contact family, regulators, or labor unions when their rights are violated. In [August 2024](#), 10 migrant fishers reported to the Fisheries Agency that they were kept aboard the You Fu for 15 months, had their documents confiscated, and were not paid an estimated \$80,850 USD in wages. They were unable to call for help when food and water grew scarce and injuries and sickness occurred. This is just one example of endemic practices in the seafood supply chain.

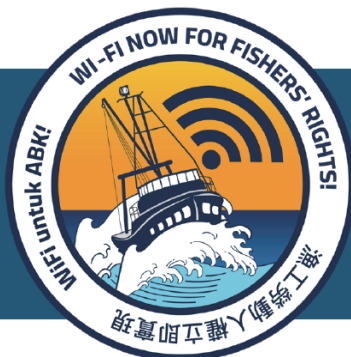
Taiwan called to investigate migrant worker's death on fishing boat | Taiwan News | Apr. 10, 2024 15:58



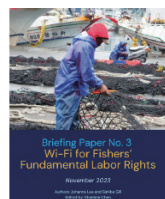
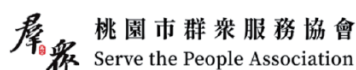
Existing certification schemes do not identify or prevent forced labor in the tuna supply chain, and do not reflect input from fishers.

The industry-standard [MSC](#) certification program derives 89% of its income from logo licensing, creating an incentive for lax standards. It had *no labor standards* until 2022, when it introduced a “self-declaration” process (by which suppliers “self-declare” the absence of human rights violations). This involves no worker voice or verification process – no evidence directly from workers whose labor conditions are being certified. [Fishery Improvement Projects](#) (FIPs) are also commonly referenced in credentialing “responsible” seafood sourcing. FIPs allow suppliers to claim participation even before that have met any labor standards, and they have non-binding guidelines and no enforcement mechanisms. Conditions of forced labor are increasingly found in both MSC certified and FIP fisheries. (*New research on MSCs available [here](#).*)

'A fishing accident blinded me but I was forced to keep working': abuses faced by workers who catch our fish
Negligence, physical and verbal abuse are common in unregulated industry. Now labor groups and government officials are trying to crack



To prevent forced labor risks in the tuna supply chain, fishers must have fundamental labor rights and a collective voice at sea. That means access to Wi-Fi and enforceable supply chain agreements to protect fishers' fundamental rights at work. Enforceable supply chain agreements have successfully ensured rights to occupational safety and health; protections from wage theft; and freedom of association and anti-retaliation protections.



The multinational grocery retailers who sell tuna to consumers face risk as a result of forced labor in tuna supply chains. They can be part of the problem, or part of the solution.

Grocery retailers in the US--the largest buyers of albacore tuna--can protect fishers' fundamental labor rights and mitigate labor risks in their supply chains through **Enforceable Supply Chain Agreements (ESCA)**s. These agreements safeguard fundamental labor rights, including access to Wi-Fi, as a means of realizing freedom of association for fishers. They also enable multinational retailers to use their buying power to incentivize high-road labor practices down the supply chain, to the vessel level.

On the other hand, retailers and investors who fail to identify and address the risks of serious labor violations face consequences for failing to comply with mandatory human rights due diligence, forced labor regulations, and other requirements for responsible business and investor conduct.

BIGGEST BUYERS OF ALBACORE TUNA



WHAT CAN SHAREHOLDERS DO?

- 1 Seek information from grocery retailers on their current practices to guarantee that their tuna supply chain is free from forced labor and to ensure fundamental labor rights.
- 2 Urge tuna supply chain transparency in engagements with tuna buyers, including grocery retailers, in order to promote accountability through ESCAs.
- 3 Encourage grocery retailers to use their buying power to protect supply chain workers through ESCAs, a real solution to forced labor risks in tuna supply chains.

What is an Enforceable Supply Chain Agreement (ESCA)?

Enforceable Supply Chain Agreements (ESCA)s are designed to address workers' rights violations in global supply chains that rely on labor in the Global South, and in which competition for lower costs of production creates downward pressure on regulation and wages. ESCAs link sourcing choices with supply chain entities that respect fundamental labor rights, including freedom of association, as shown by workplace and/or sectoral union agreements.

Strong unions and collective worker monitoring and worker agency enables actors at the top of supply chains to operate with a high degree of confidence that actual working conditions conform with national law and international labor standards. Audits and self-reporting mechanisms have repeatedly been shown to under-report labor rights violations and other human rights harms, creating-- rather than mitigating-- serious compliance risks for companies.

ESCA)s are negotiated and structured in relation to worker priorities and supply chain and market realities, and are a best practice for industry, investors, and workers.

For example, in its second year of implementation, the Dindigul Agreement to End Gender Based Violence has met its goals of eliminating, remediating, and preventing gender based violence and harassment at a spinning mill and garment factory in Tamil Nadu, India, resulting in positive change for workers, as well as positive business impacts. A September 2024 independent report, *The Dindigul Agreement Year Two Progress Report* from the Global Labor Institute (Cornell), finds that the agreement met key performance indicators mutually agreed upon by garment retailers, factories, and labor stakeholders. The independent report also found that the productive union-management dialogue was mutually beneficial for workers and industry.

September 2024 / For more information, visit laborrights.org or contact mandijackson@globallaborjustice.org