



Intersection of Seafood Sustainability and Labour

Working Group Conference Call 1

April 28, 2016

Opening Remarks

In recent years, the global seafood sector has made significant advances within environmental sustainability, but little has been done to engage in cross-sectoral efforts to address both sustainability and human rights issues. Insufficient data and analysis has led to a weak understanding of the significance of the link in the Thai fishing industry, and recognition of the link between environmental damage and human rights abuse is considered both relatively new and largely theoretical.

The Working Group as such has a unique opportunity to do valuable work in this space. The purpose of the initial call was to get inputs from businesses, seafood sustainability experts, and others on what some of the key knowledge gaps in this area are, and what proposed activities for the year could look like. The group is resourced to conduct research and capacity-building activities over the course of the year and will build the ideas and suggestions raised in the initial call into a proposed work plan to be shared with working group participants for review.

Participants:

Corey Peet (Postelsia)	Lisa Rende Taylor (Issara Institute)
Dominique Gautier (Seafarms UK)	Mariah Boyle (FishWise)
Estelle Brennan (Lyons Seafood)	Mark Taylor (Issara Institute)
Jack Scott (Nestle Purina)	Sarah MacDonald (Seafood Watch)
Joe Zhou (Red Lobster)	Taylor Voorhees (Seafood Watch)
Josh Stride (Issara Working Group leader)	Wendy Norden (Seafood Watch)
Karen Green (Seafish)	Emma van Dam (Issara Institute)

Key issues identified by participants

1. The **sustainable seafood movement is heavily focused on certification** with numerous certification schemes competing to ensure a product has been sustainably sourced. While audits and certification processes are able to capture meaningful indicators of environmental sustainability to some extent, it is necessary to explore alternative approaches, especially when it comes to identifying issues of forced labour in the seafood industry. Check-list approaches are part of a larger compliance framework which frequently fails to identify forced labour given its limited 'point-in-time' perspective of conditions in a supply chain and weak connection to workers.
2. **Certification schemes for seafood currently only cover around 20% of sourcing** and are focused primarily on farms, with the other 80% of seafood supply chains, from feed mills to vessels fishing for wild catch, still largely uncovered. Visibility of what is really happening on fishing vessels is still incredibly low and retailers and importers are currently in the process of grappling with this challenge, gathering information on how to gain better visibility of issues at sea. So far, it looks as if the Seafish certification scheme is the only scheme planning to include assessments of labour risks that far down the supply chain.

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3. **Issara's worker-voice focused approach** is a unique alternative to audits which has the capacity to capture the experiences of thousands of fishermen (in relation to both IUU and labour practices at sea) at any moment in time. This type of model has not existed before, and has not, so far, been integrated with a sustainability approach. By building these considerations into Issara's data gathering work – including information gathered through the hotline, worker interviews and ongoing engagement with businesses – there is an excellent opportunity to generate data, which can be used to identify trends. In particular, ensuring that information including vessel and gear types, fishing methods and tactics and fishing grounds are included in Issara's wider data gathering project.
4. Participants from FishWise, Seafish, and Seafood Watch were in agreement that the **sustainability industry is hungry for better data on this issue**, especially as marks like Seafood Watch and FishWise look to increase coverage of social issues in their assessment mechanisms. Seafood Watch reported that they are currently working with Seafish and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership to test a new social development tool, which will aim to identify hotspots of risks. This information will then be used to raise awareness of these risks among retailer partners, supporting them in setting strategies to address environmental and social issues.
5. **Businesses present also reported seeing clear value in strengthening the links between environment and labour**, as corporate sustainability strategies inevitably aim to tackle both and would like to do so in a coordinated way. Nestle reported that their demonstration boat, which will be used to train boat owners, captains, and workers on labour standards and fishing management practices, will serve to raise awareness of what sustainability means in terms of both an IUU perspective, and workers' rights at sea.
6. Scott Sanders, Issara's Research and GIS specialist spoke about ways the group could use Issara's access to various data-points to generate **analysis of correlations and trends** across multiple variables. Outputs could include risk profiles for different types of fishing vessels, heat maps indicating key hotspots of bad practice and others.
7. **Information on the different structures of workforces on vessels, labour management practices, and to what extent government controls are having an impact on worker safety is scarce** and the Thai seafood industry continues to be talked about in a very broad way. The types of vessels and locations where vessels are fishing are likely to have a strong impact on the level of risk associated, and it would be useful to get a better, more nuanced understanding of this. A key focus for the working group could be to capture data on the differences between practices on the different types of vessels in a way that allows the industry to map ways to tackle systemic problems for different vessel categories. Seafish reported that one paper on this topic (although not specific to Thailand) has been written so far; there may be potential to share this at a later stage. Going forward, the working group will need to identify what data it would be most useful to collect.
8. **Issara is currently building a database** which will be able to use data gathered through interviews with workers, field visits, key informants, and thousands of hotline callers from across all tiers of the seafood supply chain to identify key players involved in both sustainability and labour-related issues. Since its inception, Issara has received calls to its hotline where Burmese, Cambodian, and Lao workers have shared not just details about labour rights abuses, but also information on e.g. what kinds of vessels they work on, what kind of equipment is used, what



kind of fish caught, what volumes dumped in the ocean. There is huge potential to mine this data in a more nuanced way, and for Issara to develop additional tools that will allow for the collection of more data that could be meaningful from an environment perspective.

9. The working group could play a **key role in educating the industry on the overlap between sustainability and labour** as work progresses, providing a clear picture of what needs to be addressed, and where different organisations' areas of expertise can contribute to a collaborative debate.

Priorities identified

- Conducting a **landscape analysis** of current data available and key data gaps to inform the working groups activities for the year.
- Identifying a set of **guiding principles** for businesses to adopt outlining recommended management practices across their supply chain.
- **Issara visits to suppliers in strategic partners' supply chains** over the coming months offer a good opportunity to document current supplier practices, and will enable Issara's team to identify key gaps in both data collected, and the subsequent analysis of this data. These findings can be used to contribute to the landscape analysis, as well as broader trend reports which can be shared with the group.
- Participants agreed that it could be beneficial for **materials produced by the working group to be shared at seafood shows and other industry events** to share learning and progress the debate on a larger scale. It was acknowledged that a collaborative effort made by such a large and diverse number of stakeholders has not been seen so far.
- A question was asked around whether the group would address issues in Thailand, or would look more broadly at the seafood industry as a whole. It was agreed that while the **focus will centre on Thailand at first**, learning and research from the working group is likely to be applicable to the industry more widely and may be scaled up as work progresses.

Key Decisions & Next Steps

- Issara will conduct a **landscape analysis** outlining proposed research and capacity-building activities. This analysis will be shared with participants in advance of the next working group meeting.
- The **common language group** hosted by Seafish on 21 July 2016 could be a potential opportunity to share the proposed landscape analysis with a wider audience. Details for this event will be shared with the group.
- **Working Group calls** will initially take place every 2 months. Issara will schedule the next call for early July 2016. Materials and key areas for discussion will be shared in advance of the next meeting