

Thailand News Articles from January 2020 to April 2022



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<https://www.icsf.net/news/>



Fishing boats up for sale as tough Thai rules affect fishermen

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2022/04/08/fishing-boats-up-for-sale-as-tough-thai-rules-affect-fishermen>

"Fishery groups from across Thailand have applied to sell almost 800 of their fishing vessels to the government, in the face of harsher rules aimed at curbing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

National Fisheries Association of Thailand president Mongkol Sukcharoenkana on Thursday (April 7) said a total of 792 fishing boats were offered to be sold to the government, as their owners can no longer shoulder the higher costs.

He blamed the situation on unreasonably severe penalties set by the Emergency Decree on Fisheries, which became more stringent after its latest amendment in 2017.

Due to the rules, fishing boats can only be used for 240 days per year while the owners have the burden of covering the costs for the entire year, Mongkol said.

Also, the fishery industry is facing a shortage of workforce, he added, blaming the problem on the government's policy that is incompatible with reality .

The Thai fisheries industry is dying. Commercial fishery has decreased 60 per cent and the catches account for less than 40 per cent of the previous amount, Mongkol said..."

Seafood festival sizzles through Ranong streets of Thailand until Feb 23

<https://www.nationmultimedia.com/thai-destination/40012577>

"The 2022 Ranong Seafood Festival kicked off on Saturday at Ban Ngaow Canal in Muang district in Thailand. The event, which features music performances and seafood street stalls with special prices runs for five days until Wednesday (February 23) from 3pm to 8pm.

The Ranong Seafood Festival aims to attract both Thai and foreign tourists to Ranong to speed up economic recovery from the impact of Covid-19, as well as to showcase the safety of Ranongs seafood products, said Boonchai Somjai, Ranong deputy governor.

The event is being organised in collaboration with the Commerce Ministry, which also wants to promote Ranong as a trade hub of the South, led by the seafood industry, to help create more jobs for the locals.

The opening ceremony on Saturday was the cue for crowds of visitors to sample low-priced, fresh seafood and panoramic views of the Andaman Sea. The festival is taking place under Public Health Ministry Covid-19 preventive measures.

Thailand establishes special police unit to crack down on illegal fishing

<https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/40012358>

"The Royal Thai Police has established a special taskforce, IUU Hunter , to monitor and control the fishing industry and stop Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU) in Thai waters.

""The IUU Hunter unit will have around 100 officers who will actively investigate the fishing industry in 22 coastal provinces to ensure that their business operations are legal and free of forced labour or victims of human trafficking syndicates, deputy national police chief Pol Lt-General Surachet Hakpal said on Monday.

We will start with investigating over 10,000 commercial fishing boats that have registered with the Department of Fisheries and will get their licence during February and March. Interested entrepreneurs can contact the provincial fishery office or the PIPO fishery centre to get their trawlers investigated and ensure that they comply with related laws.

Surachet added that the taskforce will help improve Thailand's monitoring, control and surveillance capability against IUU fishing and human trafficking. Thailand is aiming to become Asean leader in anti-IUU fishing as well as to improve our status on the US Trafficking in Persons Report, from the current Tier 2 Watchlist level to Tier 2 level, he said.

Tier 2 Watchlist refers to countries whose governments do not fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Acts minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. To get to Tier 2 level, the country must not have a significant number of victims of severe forms of trafficking.

Conservationists in Thailand's Phuket butt heads with locals on coral reef

<https://thethaiger.com/news/national/phuket-conservationists-butt-heads-with-locals-on-coral-reef>

"Conservationists are fighting to stop a bay being dredged in Ao Kung in Pa Khlok, on Phuket's east coast, as they say it will damage nearby coral reefs. A former village headman says the bay needs to be dredged because fishing boats have a hard time getting to the port at low tide.

At a meeting with representatives of local government offices, and about 180 local residents, the majority voted to dredge the bay. But the leader of the Baan Ao Kung Mangrove Forest Conservation Group said the meeting was truly unfair to stakeholders.

Yesterday, the leader submitted an objection to the meetings outcome. The former village headman acknowledged the groups concern, and said the authorities examination of areal photos showed the environment and nearby mangrove forests wouldn't be impacted.

The headman said, There have been several rounds of hearings of public opinions in which the majority agreed to take action. Therefore, the Marine Department should now conduct the dredging.

Ao Kung has so much coral that its sometimes called Coral Island. Many visitors have posted photos of all the coral they have seen during low tide. In 2018, the mangrove conservation group stopped a sports complex from being built at the bay because it was concerned about the environmental impact.

Thai companies renew MoU to improve migrant fishermen's quality of life

<https://www.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/CHAROEN-POKPHAND-FOODS-PU-10859580/news/Charoen-Pokphand-Foods-Public-CP-Foods-and-partners-renew-MoU-to-improve-Fishermen-s-quality-of-li-37824582/>

"Seven public-private agencies in Thailand, including Charoen Pokphand Foods Public Company Limited (CP Foods), have signed a MoU to continue a second phase of Fishermen Life Enhancement Center (2021-2025) to promote better quality of life for migrant fishermen and their families.

The MoU was signed by representative from seven organizations, consisting of the Fish Marketing Organization; Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives; Department of Labour Protection and Welfare; Family Planning Association of Thailand; Stella Maris Centre Songkhla, G.E.P.P. SA-ARD Co.,Ltd, PTT Global Chemical Public Company Limited and Charoen Pokphand Foods (CP Foods), to tackle a complex human-rights issue in Thailand.

The project's second phase aims to further enhance equity and human rights protection. Moreover, FLEC will initiate multiple activities to promote food security and eliminate ocean plastic pollution, using self-sufficient economy and circular economy as guidelines, respectively.

Authorities fighting to keep oil slick at bay in Koh Samet island, Thailand

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2255931/samet-sos-fight-to-keep-oil-slick-at-bay>

"Authorities in Thailand are trying to contain an oil slick that has already damaged a stretch of coast in Rayong before it reaches the western shore of famous island Koh Samet. Natural Resources and Environment Minister Varawut Silpa-archa said on Sunday multiple agencies were deploying teams to try to contain the oil slick as it drifted towards Ao Phrao, a small bay on the holiday island's western shore.

"If the oil reached inside this area it could impact the beach and cause heavy damage to the shallow water corals," Mr Varawut said. Koh Samet is part of the Khao Laem Ya-Koh Samet National Park.

The Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department said on Sunday half of Mae Rampheung beach in Muang district was still tainted by the oil that leaked from an underwater pipeline.

A thin layer of oil was deposited along six kilometres of the shoreline from the Fisheries Department's Fisheries Research Centre to Khao Laem Ya, it added.

The area forms part of the 12 kilometres-long area of Mae Rampheung that was declared a disaster area by the province on Saturday.

Communities kept in the dark about Thailand's Yuam River diversion impacts

<https://www.eco-business.com/news/communities-kept-in-the-dark-about-thailands-yuam-river-diversion-impacts/>

"When he was young, Singkharn Ruenhom used to go fishing with his father along the Yuam River on Thailand's northwestern border with Myanmar. When he became a father, he fished on the river with his sons. But he is now worried that his grandchildren might not get to do the same.

Like Ruenhom, many in the communities across Mae Hong Son, Tak and Chiang Mai provinces are concerned about their homes and heritage. In September 2021, a project was approved to divert an average of 1,795 cubic metres of water annually to irrigate the central plains in these provinces.

They did not tell us what impacts there would be, said Ekachai Jamonjarudet, a resident of one of the villages affected by the project in Omkoi district, Chiang Mai. They told us not to worry because they will compensate us or find new land for us.

The project will be the first to dam this tributary of the Salween, one of the last free-flowing rivers left in the world. On Myanmar's side of the border, the Salween faces a number of potential mainstream hydropower projects; Chinese companies are involved in the construction or development of most of them.

2004 Indian Ocean tsunami: 17 years on, a look back at one of the deadliest natural disasters in history

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/2004-indian-ocean-tsunami-17-years-on-a-look-back-at-one-of-the-deadliest-natural-disasters-in-history-101640476494667.html>

"December 26, 2021, marks 17 years since the devastating Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004 which struck the coasts of multiple countries in south and southeast Asia and took a fatal toll on the population there. Listed among the worst calamities in this part of the world, more than 230,000 people across India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand, and Indonesia were and the countries sustained billions of dollars worth of damages to property after the 100-foot tsunami triggered by a magnitude 9.1 earthquake.

The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami is also known as the Boxing Day Tsunami or, in the scientific community, the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake. According to a report by CNN, the tremors were so powerful that it was one of those rare instances when the entire planet vibrated and no place on Earth escaped movement.

Globally, this earthquake was large enough to basically vibrate the whole planet as much as half an inch, or a centimeter, the report quoted an associate professor of geosciences at the Penn State University in the United States. Everywhere we had instruments, we could see motions.

Triggered by the undersea earthquake activity offshore, the 100-feet-high tsunami waves laid bare complete annihilation in as many as 14 countries, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

According to geological estimates, the 2004 earthquake was the third-largest of its type to ever be recorded, and it managed to even trigger aftershocks as far away as in Alaska. The plight of the affected people and countries prompted a worldwide humanitarian response, with donations totalling more than \$14 billion.

Indonesia, hit worst by the disaster, was however no stranger to earthquakes, lying between the Pacific Ring of Fire and the Alpide Belt along the south and west. The 2002 Sumatra earthquake is, in fact, believed to have been a foreshock to this main event.

Bangkok-based startup incubator seeks applications for third FoodTech programme

<https://thefishsite.com/articles/space-f-seeks-applications-for-third-foodtech-programme>

"SPACE-F, the global FoodTech startup incubator and accelerator programme, headquartered in Bangkok, is inviting applications for Batch III of its FoodTech program. Established through

cooperation between the National Innovation Agency (NIA), Thai Union Group and Mahidol University, SPACE-F runs an innovative curriculum based on networking and mentorship meant to pioneer DeepTech innovation with FoodTech startups.

Former participants include the cell-based seafood startup Avant Meats; Saxo-Siam Protein, which aims to produce and process black soldier fly larvae for aquafeeds; and HydroNeo, which is developing a smart shrimp farm management system.

The applications for SPACE-F Batch III are open now until 22 November 2021, with a maximum of 20 startups to be selected, for both the Accelerator and Incubator Programs. The Accelerator Program runs for five months and is designed around strategic partnerships and scaling up, while the Incubator Program runs for nine months with the aim of product development and launch.

Batch III of this program is powered by Nest ASEAN. At NIA, we have the sole aim of enhancing National Innovation Systems (NIS) of Thailand, a process based on strategic cooperation with innovative organizations across the country and all over the world, said Dr Punarj Chairatana, executive director of NIA, in a press release.

Thailand intensifies suppression of illegal fishing

<https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/thailand-intensifies-suppression-of-illegal-fishing-378043>"

Deputy Prime Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan has directed the Department of Fisheries to step up the suppression of illegal fishing while providing compensation for unregistered fishing vessels that have not violated the law.

Deputy Prime Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan presided over a meeting of the National Fisheries Committee held via video conference, where the issues of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and environmental impacts from fisheries were on the agenda.

The DPM urged all subcommittees to expedite and follow up on the operations, and to collaborate their efforts in solving IUU fishing, as well as providing aid to affected stakeholders.

Panel urges protection of Mekong fish stocks

<https://www.ucanews.com/news/panel-urges-protection-of-mekong-fish-stocks/94612#>

"The Mekong River Commission (MRC) today released two reports recommending the protection of fish stocks to ensure food supplies for millions of people in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

Around 65 million people rely on the Mekong for their chief source of protein and live hand to mouth, but climate change, drought, dam construction in Laos and China and illegal fishing have resulted in sharply lower fish catches.

The reports" Status and Trends of Fish Abundance and Diversity in the Lower Mekong Basin during 2007"2018 (FADM) and Social Impact Monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment 2018 (SIMVA 2018) " found people continue to rely on water resources that are increasingly under pressure.

Workers in fishing in Thailand need monthly pay: Oxfam

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2165671/workers-in-fishing-need-monthly-pay>

"Oxfam in Thailand is calling on employers in the fishing industry to provide their workers with a monthly wage to help ensure their quality of life during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chakchai Comthongdee, a campaign coordinator for Oxfam, said since most workers in the fishing industry are paid a daily wage, many do not earn any income on their days off. While the workers are assured a minimum wage as specified by the law, Mr Chakchai said they should be paid monthly, which would allow the workers to plan ahead and improve their quality of life.

The lack of a monthly wage, he said, has made it almost impossible for many workers to afford quality food and medicine.

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem: Raising awareness

<https://borneobulletin.com.bn/raising-awareness-on-the-mangrove-ecosystem/>

"Since being adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015, the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem is celebrated every July 26.

According to UNESCO, it aims to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems as a unique, special and vulnerable ecosystem, as well as to promote solutions for their sustainable management, conservation and uses. In line with this year's occasion, Executive Director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Dr Theresa Mundita S Lim issued a statement, in which

she said the ACB joins the rest of the world in celebrating International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem.

She highlighted that the occasion is observed each year to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of protecting the world's most productive ecosystems. Mangroves in the ASEAN REGION are rich and diverse, armouring communities against the cruel impacts of climate change and, at the same time, underpinning community livelihoods as well as economies, she said.

The region hosts 42 per cent of mangrove forests in the world, with an estimated total area of 42,914 square kilometres as of 2020. At least 47 out of the 70 known mangrove species in the world can be found in the region, according to the database of the ASEAN Clearing House Mechanism. She affirmed that it is worth noting how crucial these ecosystems are in supporting the interconnectivity of key biodiversity areas.

As they link the land and the sea, mangrove systems receive nutrients and organic matter from terrestrial ecosystems, estuaries, and marine systems. These nutrient-rich ecosystems serve as habitats for land animals and nesting and breeding areas for fish and shellfish, migratory birds, and sea turtles. The benefits arising from mangrove ecosystems extend to nearby ecosystems such as fisheries. By serving as nursery habitats, mangrove areas allow key marine species to thrive before moving to other areas as they mature.

Sharing an example, Dr Lim mentioned that in Thailand, the Ao Phang Nga-Mu Ko Surin- Mu ko Similan National Park, a designated ASEAN Heritage Park (AHP), has one of the country's most extensive and best-preserved mangrove forests that support marine species like the critically endangered black finless porpoise and green sea turtles. She explained that, apart from cleaning and filtering out pollutants from the water before it reaches the ocean, mangroves sturdy root systems form a natural barrier against storm surges and floods.

Similarly, several studies show that the movement and exchange of organic carbon among ecosystems support the networks of coastal ecosystems that release and trap carbon and nutrient from adjacent ecosystems.

With their high carbon sequestration and storage capacity, mangrove systems, along with seagrass and coral reefs, are considered tools for climate change mitigation. These valuable contributions to climate mitigation and adaptation and the peoples welfare are enough reasons for us to do more to protect these ecosystems, continued the executive director. At this point, amid the more frequent and intense climate-related disasters coming our way, actions to integrate biodiversity considerations into programmes and policies are even more dire and urgent.

Biodiversity and climate change issues are interdependent and should not be tackled separately. Over the years, we have seen the decline of mangroves, losing over 26 per cent of mangroves in the ASEAN region alone from 1980 to 2005, largely due to human-driven activities, such as

logging and conversion to other uses, she said, adding that the first step to address the loss of mangroves is to assess and appreciate the true value of mangrove systems.

Taking into account the opportunity costs of losing nature brings us closer to the best possible solution for our present woes. Dr Lim highlighted that at the regional and national levels, there are increasing efforts to protect and restore mangroves and other crucial ecosystems. In Brunei Darussalam, the government is paying close attention to widening the coverage of its mangroves and peat swamp forests in the development of its national biodiversity strategies and plans, she said.

The executive director shared that this August, the ACB together with the ASEAN Secretariat will formally launch the ASEAN Green Initiative, which aims to plant and grow 10 million native trees in 10 years across the region.

The initiative, which is in line with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, encourages the use of local species and the active participation of the community and local experts to ensure that ecosystems are effectively restored to their healthy and stable state.

Indeed, the role of communities to protect mangroves is important, she affirmed, noting that the ACB continues to support civil society organisations through the Small Grants Programme, in cooperation with the German Development Bank (KfW) in enabling communities to restore and protect ecosystems and improving livelihood opportunities.

Dr Lim said that one of the programmes sites is a designated AHP, Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary, an extensive mangrove forested island. The project is ongoing despite some setbacks due to COVID-19.

I am likewise pleased that biodiversity and nature-based solutions are high on the agenda of the ASEAN member states based on earlier pronouncements made, including more recently at the online event co-convened by the ACB and the United Kingdom COP26 Presidency.

On this occasion, let us take this opportunity to motivate each other to work closely together and step up efforts for the protection of nature's marvels, for we are part of nature, she added.

Support mangrove conservation, UNESCO chief says

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096392>

"The world is waking up to the importance of mangroves, a senior UN official said on Monday, underscoring the need for everyone to support restoration and protection of these crucial habitats. Audrey Azoulay, Director General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), made the appeal in her message for the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem, observed on 26 July.

Mangroves are found in tropical and sub-tropical regions, on the boundary between land and sea. Globally, they cover a surface of just 14.8 million hectares, or roughly equivalent to the size of Greece. They protect biodiversity by sheltering and nurturing marine life. They function like filtration systems, absorbing nutrients and pollutants. They fight coastal erosion, acting as breakwaters to dissipate storm surges and wave energy. Above all, they play an essential role as carbon sinks, sequestering atmospheric and oceanic carbon for long periods of time, said Ms. Azoulay.

Yet despite these benefits, UNESCO estimated that some countries lost more than 40 per cent of their mangroves between 1980 and 2005, often due to coastal development. Although human health has always depended on the health of the planet, Ms. Azoulay said the importance of mangrove systems is now increasingly clear.

The world is now waking up to the importance of mangroves “and other blue carbon ecosystems, including salt marshes, seagrass beds and coastal wetlands, she said. UNESCO strives to conserve mangroves through its work on Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites, the latter of which alone spans more than 10 per cent of all marine protected areas globally, or 200 million hectares.

The agency’s initiative on Biosphere Reserves, which reconciles biodiversity conservation with sustainable use, also provides a unique blueprint for preservation, Ms. Azoulay added. In these areas, UNESCO is committed to implementing science-based solutions in coordination with local and indigenous communities, to support humanity’s ability to cope with socio-ecological change, she said, pointing to examples in Thailand, Senegal, and the United Arab Emirates.

More than 700 sites in 129 countries are part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, which turns 50 this year, as the UN launches a Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. Through these initiatives and others, we are working to protect mangroves and to better support scientific research into these environments, said Ms. Azoulay. She urged people everywhere to contribute to conservation efforts so that, together, we can put a stop to mangrove habitat destruction, and restore what we have already lost.

Thailand migrant workers sign contracts they dont understand, undercutting efforts to stop abuses

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/thailand-migrant-workers-sign-contracts-they-dont-understand-undercutting-efforts>

"Migrant workers from Cambodia and Myanmar are being asked to sign contracts they cannot read in order to work in Thailand’s fishing fleet, a new study has found, undercutting efforts to expunge abuses from a sector worth billions of dollars to the Southeast Asian country.

Thailand is one of the world's largest fish and seafood producers, boasting global brands that include John West and Chicken of the Sea. Authorities have been scrambling for several years to clean up an industry riddled with abuses, though, after grim revelations of human trafficking of Thais and migrant workers, forced work, defaults on payments, beatings and even murders on fishing boats.

All of this contributed to the U.S State Department dropping Thailand onto the worst possible ranking " Tier 3 " of its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report in 2015, as well as threats by the European Union to suspend seafood imports for alleged illegal and overfishing.

However, Thai government efforts to register all workers with contracts, identity cards and e-payments to ensure salaries are paid rather than deferred " alongside wider prosecution of human traffickers " have helped the kingdom move into Tier 2.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha has said he hopes his country will be elevated to the top tier -- compliant with U.S. standards -- after an extensive campaign to monitor the fishing sector, including spot inspections and electronic tags to track unscrupulous boat owners.

The latest TIP report is expected to be published in the coming weeks; but a survey by the ITF-Fishers Rights Network, shows that basic legal protections for workers are still not being met. Of 520 fishers surveyed at Thai ports between March-June 2021, the FRN said just a tiny fraction had even had their contracts translated into their native languages.

A shocking 89 percent of fishers had not had their contract translated or explained to them in a language they could understand, said Jon Hartough, ITF-FRN Thailand Project Lead. Quite often fishers are recruited in rural areas of Myanmar and Cambodia ... it's a verbal contract when they are told what the terms and conditions will be. But when they sign the document, its unclear what the conditions are, they are signing, he added.

This is important ... because of how this manifests in working conditions. Vulnerable fishers are often low-skilled and desperate for income" a condition worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as Myanmar's economic collapse following a February 1 coup. Burmese and Khmer fishers still face serious issues such as wage theft, lack of adequate food or clean drinking water on board, debt bondage, document retention and other labor abuses, according to Ye Thwe, FRN president and former fisherman.

The Thai government commitments are as thin as the paper they're written on. Labor violations are still rampant, and contracts are not being properly followed, he said, adding fishers often report late or incomplete payments, dangerous conditions at sea and deliberately misleading contracts - where they exist at all.

The Department of Fisheries says it has translated government guidelines into fishers languages, so they know their rights under tightened Thai laws. The DOF has prepared a manual for

commercial fishermen ... in an easy-to-understand language and distributed it to fishermen, to build knowledge and understanding of legal guidelines, Mesak Pakdeekong, director general of the Department of Fisheries, told reporters in early June. Meanwhile, authorities have released a ~PROTECT-U multilingual app to help victims of trafficking seek urgent help safely.

While not named in the FRN study, big seafood companies including Thai Union, which owns Chicken of the Sea, say they have made major strides to clean up their supply chains and adhere strictly to government rules. But labor rights groups say the recruitment system is prone to abuses. Brokers travel across poor rural areas of Southeast Asia persuading desperate workers to go to sea for long periods of time, often far from contact with authorities or their families.

As profit margins are squeezed in overfished seas, experts say boat owners or unscrupulous captains who marshal the workers hold out on agreed salaries or instead promise a percentage of the catch as payment that never materializes.

Yet the supply of labor has increased since the pandemic with whole communities left out of work for months on end. One Thai fisherman from the landlocked northeastern farming region of Isaan, who has been cheated of his wages before but is, preparing to go back out to sea, said the poorest have few options as the pandemic crushes their incomes.

The guys from my village still go out to sea, the fisher told VOA news, requesting anonymity. We know the risks, but were willing to gamble our lives. Staying home can be as bad; we can go hungry.

Fishermen in Phuket, Thailand, request rule expansion as competition booms

<https://www.thephuketnews.com/local-fishermen-request-rule-expansion-as-competition-booms-80607.php>

"A group of around 100 local fishermen have filed a formal request to the Phuket Governor seeking permission to expand the scope of their allocated fishing area, stating increased competition due to COVID-19 has hindered their catch numbers. The current law states local fishermen are not permitted to operate beyond a 1.5 nautical mile radius from Phukets shoreline, something members of the local fishing industry claim needs to be revised.

The group, led by Phuket Fishery Association head Somsak Promkaew, gathered at Queen Sirikit Park in Phuket Town around 1pm yesterday (July 7) to air their grievances and present their formal request to Phuket Vice Governor Pichet Panapong. Several of the group also had placards and signs containing slogans such as Phuket fishermen do not have sufficient area to work in, Be kind to us, and We want our 3 nautical miles back.

As a result of the COVID-19 economic crisis, an increasing number of people have turned to fishing in order to generate an income, Mr Somsak commented. Before the pandemic there were

around only 1,200 boats registered with the Phuket office of the Fishery Department “ that figure has grown considerably in the last 12 months.

That is why we are asking authorities to seriously consider our request to increase the catchment area to three nautical miles in order to reduce the congestion. We always adhere to the standards of sustainable fishing with a focus on protecting and maintaining natural resources. We do not operate in an irresponsible way and always follow the law by fishing away from the coral reef where tourists go diving, he added.

V/Gov Pichet told the fisherman that he will discuss this request with relevant officers and inform them of the outcome accordingly. Meanwhile, the Phuket Public Health Office (PPHO) have issued a COVID-19 alert for vendors and local residents present at the fish auction site at Sinpaiboonchai fishing pier in Rassada over a three-day period late last month. Those who went to the pier from June 26-29, between 9 and 10am are considered high-risk people, the alert said.

Groups urge Thailand to step up action to protect foreign fishermen

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/fishers-rights-06292021145304.html>

"Advocacy groups representing foreign workers in Thailand's seafood industry called on the government Tuesday to ensure that employment contracts are made transparent, and to act to prevent workplace exploitation or abuses aboard Thai-owned fishing boats.

A new survey by the Fishers Rights Network found that about nine out of 10 foreign migrants working on fishing boats in Thailand had not had their contract translated or explained in a language they can understand. Tens of thousands of migrants from neighboring countries, including Myanmar and Cambodia, work in Thailand's fishing sector.

At an online news conference where survey results were presented, the network and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) urged Bangkok to do much more to implement Convention No. 188 (C188) of the International Labor Organization. The convention, which came into force in November 2017, aims to shield employees in the seafood industry from abuses or exploitation.

Number one, we would like to call on the Royal Thai Government to effectively enforce C188 and ensure that all fishers have a copy of their contracts in their own language, Jon Hartough, the Thailand project lead at the federation, told reporters.

In addition, all port-in, port-out centers in the country should allow fishers to review and verify the contracts presented by employers at inspection, and report violations in a safe and protected space, he said. And finally, fishers are demanding that Thai authorities enforce employment contracts provisions and protect migrant fishers rights.

Thailand, in January 2019, was the first country in Southeast Asia to ratify the convention, which sets out binding requirements to protect the labor rights of people who work on fishing boats, and to address issues they face in the workplace.

Ye Thwe, the president of the Fishers Rights Network who used to work as a foreign migrant in the Thai fishing sector, also urged the government to step up enforcement of the ILO convention. Thailand has ratified C188 but Burmese and Khmer fishers still face serious issues such as wage theft, lack of adequate food or clean drinking water on board, debt bondage, document retention and other labor abuses, he said. The Thai Government commitments are as thin as the paper they're written on.

Labor violations are still rampant, with contracts not being followed properly, he said. We hear often that fishers are not paid for months at a time, face dangerous conditions onboard and are not even sure of their actual salary or other provisions listed in the contract because its not in their own language, Ye Thwe said.

In 2019, some 60,000 workers from Cambodia and Myanmar were employed on Thai fishing boats, according to the Department of Fisheries. Among the results, the survey of 520 migrant fishers working in eight Thai provinces found that 87 percent did not have a copy of their employment contract, and 89 percent had not had their contract translated or explained in a language they can understand.

Current Thai labor law and labor inspections do not meet the standards outlined in the ILO convention, said Johnny Hansen, chair of the Fisheries Section at the ITF. The results presented today clearly show that significant action is urgently needed to fully protect the labor and human rights of migrant fishers in Thailand, Hansen said. Fishers are on the front line of the global seafood supply chain and more and more consumers are demanding that the products they purchase are truly free from labor abuse or exploitation.

BenarNews asked Mesak Pakdeekong, director-general of the Department of Fisheries, to comment on the call by the labor-rights advocacy groups for more governmental action in enforcing the provisions of Convention 188.

We would definitely solve the problems but by which approach, we have to see the actual set of information. We will fix them, but let us study the details first, he said, referring to the survey by the Fishers Rights Network. Meanwhile in Pattani, a province in Thailand's Deep South where commercial fishing is a major industry, the owner of a local fishing fleet said his business complied with the law and government regulations.

The contracts with migrant workers contain their native languages, salary and were signed in front of officials. We can't hide the contract, fleet owner Surat Ratanasithorn told BenarNews.

Phuket fisheries chief defends blacktip shark fishing, ~not illegal

<https://www.thepuketnews.com/phuket-fisheries-chief-defends-blacktip-shark-fishing-not-illegal-80397.php>

"Watcharin Rattanachoo, Chief of the Phuket Fisheries Office in Thailand, has repeated his explanation that the fishing of blacktip reef sharks in areas not protected by law is not illegal.

The call follows photos of a haul of blacktip reef sharks at the Phuket Fishing Port circulating on social media overnight. Mr Watcharin already confirmed to The Phuket News yesterday that the fishing of blacktip reef sharks in non-protected areas, although not liked by many people, is not illegal.

His repeated call for understanding among the public today follows the photos of the blacktip reef sharks in baskets at Phukets Fishing Port being posted on the Facebook page of well-known Thai marine conservationist and marine animal rights leader Prof Thon Thamrongnawasawat, Deputy Dean for Special Affairs at the Faculty of Fisheries of Kasetsart University.

There is currently no law stating that the fishing and distribution of blacktip sharks is an offense if the regulated fishing equipment is used, Mr Watcharin said. He also explained that blacktip reef sharks are often caught as by-catch.

When smaller fishing vessels [under 10 tonnes gross] aim to catch grouper and other local fish, some blacktip sharks tend to be caught sometimes when they come to feed and gather around the shoreline rocks, Mr Watcharin said.

Depending on the time [of the year] the sharks move into the fishermen's fishing area. This is usual during the rainy season from around January to early June, he added. Therefore, from the news above, it is not considered a violation of the law if fishing in the area is not prohibited and the correct equipment is used, Mr Watcharin said.

Mr Watcharin pointed out efforts by the Phuket Fisheries offices in the past to prevent fishing in protected areas and the illegal fishing of specific species, especially whale sharks. But in the news such as the blacktip reef shark, the law does not make it an offense. We must also be fair to fishermen, he said.

Negotiating an agreement to eliminate fisheries subsidies: a CARICOM perspective

<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20210616/elizabeth-morgan-negotiating-agreement-eliminate-fisheries-subsidies>

"In 2001, as part of the Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO), members agreed to undertake negotiations to clarify and improve existing fisheries subsidies. The concern was that subsidies provided in fishery industries were contributing to overfishing

and the reduction of fish stocks, putting their sustainable maintenance at risk. It is estimated that subsidies to the global fishing industry, particularly to large fishing fleets, amount to about US\$35 billion per annum.

It is said that national fisheries policies in the major fishing nations, such as USA, European Union, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Russia, and China, contribute to the overexploitation of marine fish stocks. The WTO mandate was expanded at the 2005 Hong Kong Ministerial Conference calling for the prohibition of subsidies.

This mandate for eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies was included in Goal 14 of the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which addresses ~Life below water and aims to achieve the sustainable management and protection of marine and freshwater resources. SDG 14.6 specifically targets prohibiting and eliminating fisheries subsidies and endorses the WTO's role in achieving this goal.

At the 2017 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, members committed to continuing their efforts to achieve an agreement with: comprehensive and effective disciplines to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies; elimination of subsidies contributing to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and appropriate special and differential treatment (S&DT) for developing country members, including the least developed, small and vulnerable.

SEAFOOD LOVERS Here in the Caribbean, we all like our seafood (shrimps, lobsters, conch, crabs, varieties of fish, etc) and freshwater fish from rivers and aquaculture. Fish stocks in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean have been declining. It is reported that biodiversity in these waters is at serious risk due to pollution, climate change, destruction of coastal habitats and overfishing, much of which is illegal.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has reported that 20-30 per cent of fishing in the Caribbean Sea is IUU. The Caribbean fisheries sector is important as a source of food, employment and export.

A presentation from the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, based in Belize, states that as small-island and low-lying coastal states (SIDS), the total maritime area under CARICOM jurisdiction is over 2,200,000km. This is due to the 200-mile (370km) exclusive economic zones (EEZ) which countries claim under the UN Law of the Sea Convention since 1982. Guyana, Suriname and Belize also have massive inland rivers.

The regional fisheries sector employs over 142,000 people from small coastal and rural communities and accounts for up to eight per cent of GDP in some countries. Development of the sector, however, has lagged. I assume that budget allocations to provide subsidies in the fishing sectors are quite small. The Caribbeans contribution to the global fisheries exports is also minimal, being over US\$350 million in 2017.

The region is also a net importer of fish. CARICOM countries have had complicated relationships in global fishing, such as supporting whaling, registration of foreign fishing vessels, and granting major fishing nations access to their EEZs.

There has been little reporting in CARICOM on the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations in spite of the importance of the sector, and, since 2001, with several seminars, workshops, and consultations reported as having been held in the region. From 2012-2018, the WTO Negotiating Group on Rules, which is responsible for the fisheries subsidies negotiations, was chaired by Ambassador Wayne McCook, Jamaica's then permanent representative at the WTO in Geneva.

As I pointed out in my article last week, the WTO Director General (DG) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has prioritised concluding an agreement on fisheries subsidies this year and will be convening a ministerial meeting on July 15 to assess the progress towards conclusion.

Negotiations are in high gear in Geneva, and the WTO DG met with CARICOM ministers at the recent 52nd session of the Council for Trade and Economic Development. Caribbean stakeholders also held another round of consultations on Thursday, June 10.

CARICOM members are working at the WTO with the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), which is currently coordinated by Jamaica. Support work is also ongoing at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the FAO and the Commonwealth.

The key issues in these negotiations of interest to CARICOM include: 1. Prohibition of subsidies which contribute to IUU undermining sustainable development, with the aim of encouraging use of more sustainable fishing methods and development of EEZs; 2. Ensuring that maritime boundaries are set at the EEZ and not at the 12-mile (19.3km) coastal limit; 3. Gaining a carve out for small-scale and artisanal fishing, which comprises much of the activities in these countries; 4. The issue of prohibiting subsidies in already overfished stocks; 5. Having transparent and manageable notification requirements; 6. Securing S&DT provisions for small, vulnerable members to enable them to provide subsidies as necessary. These WTO negotiations have been protracted due, among other things, to disagreements over the issue of S&DT and the development status of members, e.g., China. I have written about this in previous articles.

A new consolidated draft text of the agreement was recently tabled by the current chair of the Rules Negotiating Group. It seems to be the source of further division among members. It is reported that the OACPS and India do not see this text as making major subsidy providers accountable. It also does not offer acceptable levels of protection to SIDS.

There is reported concern among non-governmental organisations about pressure being applied to members to conclude an agreement by July. The 12th WTO Ministerial Conference will be held in Geneva from November 30 to December 3. An agreement would be a major success story

for the organisation and its new DG. CARICOM members have to ensure that an agreement is in the best interest of regional fisheries sectors.

Let's see how these negotiations unfold as we move into July. It would be useful to hear directly from the regional fisheries stakeholders on their assessment of progress so far. Elizabeth Morgan is a specialist in international trade policy and international politics.

Mekong Delta posts positive results in shrimp exports

<https://sggpnews.org.vn/business/mekong-delta-posts-positive-results-in-shrimp-exports-92828.html>

"Tran Van Trung, Director of Anh Khoa Seafood Company Limited in Ca Mau Province, said that the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic affected shrimp exports, as some countries controlled imports more strictly. Therefore, goods have to wait a whole month for the host country to take samples for quarantine after being brought to the ports, leading to higher costs.

However, thanks to the initiative and good adaptation, from the beginning of this year to now, the company's shrimp exports have increased significantly compared to the same period last year. It is expected that the company's exports will be 2-3 times higher than the previous year. As one of the longtime enterprises in the shrimp industry, which also faced many difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr. Nguyen Minh Tuan, the representative of Minh Cuong Seafood Processing Joint Stock Company, said that shrimp exports of his company grew fairly well in the first months of this year.

Currently, the company tries to maintain production and export and implement strict Covid-19 prevention measures, with the determination not to let the disease enter the factory. According to the Department of Industry and Trade of Ca Mau Province, by the end of May this year, the province's shrimp exports were estimated at more than US\$423 million, achieving 40 percent of this year's plan, up more than 16 percent year-on-year.

In Bac Lieu Province, the total export turnover of shrimp products in the first five months of this year was estimated at \$280 million, up more than 9 percent over the same period. In other provinces in the Mekong Delta, shrimp exports also grew positively compared to the same period last year. Along with exporting, many shrimp farming households in the Mekong Delta continue to expand production and stabilize their lives.

Mr. Pham Van Quan, a farmer in My Long Nam Commune in Cau Ngang District of Tra Vinh Province, said that a few months before, the price of black tiger shrimps sized 30 pieces per kilogram was up to VND200,000-VND220,000 per kg, which now has decreased to about VND170,000 per kg, and that of white-leg shrimps sized 30 pieces per kg is at VND130,000-VND140,000 per kg. At this price level, farmers still ensure profits.

According to the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers, seafood exports reached roughly \$790 million in May this year, up 24 percent. Seafood exports in the first five months of this year hit \$3.27 billion, up 14 percent year-on-year. Of which, shrimp exports reached \$1.33 billion, up 14 percent year-on-year.

This is an impressive result at a time when many other agricultural products are struggling with consumption. Mr. Nguyen Quoc Toan, Director of the Agro Processing and Market Development Authority under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, said that Vietnamese seafood exports are recovering.

Specifically, in the first five months of this year, Vietnamese seafood products had been exported to over 120 markets, with the US, Japan, the EU, China, South Korea, the ASEAN, and Australia being the seafood export markets with the highest value.

As for shrimp products, the advantage is that the global import demand is increasing heavily, especially in large markets. Meanwhile, shrimp supply from some countries, such as India, Thailand, and other suppliers, has been reduced due to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking advantage of this, Vietnamese enterprises have accelerated shrimp exports in the first months of this year and got good results. It is forecasted that in the coming time, the US will continue to be a market with good growth for Vietnam's shrimp products. Vietnamese enterprises also expect to increase shrimp exports to the EU, mainly white-leg shrimps.

As for the South Korean market, there are also good signs of recovery and positive economic growth, so seafood trade with Korean enterprises will be more vibrant in the coming time. Other markets, such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and Russia, will continue to be new potential markets because demand increases and there are no uncertainties or market barriers.

Why the world's most fertile fishing ground is facing a unique and dire threat

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/14/why-the-worlds-most-fertile-fishing-ground-is-facing-a-unique-and-dire-threat>

"Since long before the steel-hulled fishing boats from foreign countries arrived in the South Pacific its people have had their own systems for sharing the oceans catches. In the New Zealand territory of Tokelau, in the middle of the region, the 1,400 people living on its three atolls practise a system called inati, which ensures every household gets fish.

Several times a month all atoll men are given time to prepare and bait lines and the grey hairs “ as leaders are called “ decide on the targeted fish, including tuna and trevally, using traditional

knowledge of the best grounds, along with tides and the phases of the moon. They set off late at night and return 12 hours later, well after the sun has risen.

Their catch is then sorted into different species and sizes. Bigger families get bigger shares. Across the Pacific, traditional fishing practices like this take place alongside huge commercial fishing operations, where the catches are not always shared so fairly, nor disclosed so transparently. The Pacific region exported 530,000 metric tonnes of seafood products in 2019, netting US\$1.2bn.

The biggest exporters were Papua New Guinea (\$470m), Fiji (\$182m), the Federated States of Micronesia (\$130m), Vanuatu (\$108m) and Solomon Islands (\$101m). The biggest importers of Pacific fish in 2019 were Thailand, with seafood imports from the Pacific worth \$300m, the Philippines (\$195m), Japan (\$130m), China (\$100m) and the US (\$100m). In some ways the fishing industry is a success story for the Pacific region. In a landmark moment of regional cooperation in 1982, eight countries signed the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, which allowed the tiny countries to collectively negotiate the access to their waters by foreign fishing vessels, a move that has generated an additional \$500m a year in revenue.

But the Pacific “ the world’s most fertile fishing ground, which supplies well over half of the world’s tuna “ also falls victim to illegal fishing, with up to one in every five wild-caught fish illegally caught. The small Pacific countries in whose waters these illegal fishing operations take place lose out on the profit, suffer depletion of stocks and, without the capacity to fully police their waters, are often also penalised by fishing importers for not being able to guarantee the sustainable provenance of the catch. The 17 nations and territories of the region directly control their own territorial waters.

Fishing outside the territorial waters, in the nation’s larger exclusive economic zones (EEZ), is monitored and coordinated by the intergovernmental Forum Fisheries Agency. Pacific EEZs produce around US\$26bn worth of tuna for consumers but the islands earn only about 10% of that value. Only a handful of Pacific countries process any of the catches in their waters “ this usually takes place in Bangkok and other Asian cities. Pacific countries seldom even crew fishing boats and make money only on the licensing.

The high seas beyond the EEZs, claimed by no one, come under the multinational Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). In 2019, WCPFCs total tuna catch was a record-setting 2,961,059 tonnes, 81% of the total Pacific Ocean tuna catch and 55% of the global tuna catch. It is dominated by boats from deep-water fishing nations including China, Japan, South Korea and the US.

Industrial-scale fishing began in the South Pacific after the second world war. It was dominated by the US and Japan but in the past two decades China has dispatched wave after wave of fishing boats, mainly longliners and purse seiners.

Longliners set out fishing lines up to 100km in length, each with up to 3,000 hooks. They use electronics to find a school of fish and then, using boat speed, haul the line through it. Careful skippers avoid killing sharks, billfish such as marlin and swordfish, sea turtles and seabirds in the process. Others do not care. Few longlining tuna boats in the Pacific have independent observers on board; as they are small and often dangerous, few want to sail on them. Purse seiners are bigger and more comfortable “attracting observers “and use onboard helicopters and floating aggregation devices to attract tuna.

A seiner will use boats to encircle an entire school with nets (the purse) which is then closed, capturing all the fish “and often dolphins and sharks. Having grossly overfished its own regional waters, notably the China seas, Chinas fleets are now taking huge quantities of tuna from the world’s most fertile fishing ground. Since 2012 the Chinese Pacific fishing fleet has grown by more than 500%. A survey of boats operating in the Pacific in 2016 found that Chinese-flagged vessels far outstripped those of any other country.

China had 290 industrial vessels licensed to operate in the region at the time, more than a quarter of the total, and more than the 240 from all the Pacific nations combined. Their longline fleets, targeting albacore and yellow fin, dominate EEZs in places such as Vanuatu and the high seas. Silky and whitetip sharks are a favourite bycatch, their fins kept and the rest dumped. In the past 10 years China and Hong Kong have sought to close down the shark fin trade, partly by banning the consumption of shark fin soup at government functions, and through public efforts to publicly stigmatise it.

The continuing decline in oceanic shark numbers points to limited success so far. According to WCPFC records, China has more than 600 vessels out of a total of 1,300 foreign-operated ships licensed to fish in the area. Earlier this year China said it had banned its fleets from catching squid in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans for three months to help populations recover. Global Times, a state-run newspaper, reported that the move highlighted Chinas image as a responsible fishing power and is a milestone for Chinas participation in international maritime management. Miren Gutierrez, a research associate at the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI), co-wrote a study on Chinese deep-water fishing.

Having depleted fish stocks in domestic waters and encouraged by subsidies, Chinas distant-water fishing fleets have been travelling farther and farther afield, and its companies have been building more and more vessels to meet the rising demand for seafood, she said. Various estimates of the Chinese fleet range between 1,600 and 3,400 vessels but the ODI study says this figure is likely to be five to eight times higher.

The authors identified 12,490 vessels observed outside internationally recognised Chinese waters between 2017 and 2018. China is a fisheries superpower, the study says. It has the largest fishing fleet and the largest DWF [distant water fishing] fleet in the world.

Chinese vessels have been extensively documented engaging in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In January the Washington-based Brookings Institute published a study, quoting industry, regulatory and media outlets, that said: Chinese fishing practices present a truly unique and dire IUU threat.

Written by the Brookings fellow Michael Sinclair, a former US Coast Guard captain, it said China used the world's largest fishing fleet to devastating effect to meet its populations huge demand for protein.

When working together in fleets, these vessels are rapacious, Sinclair wrote. Early last year, China took action when Ecuador alleged that at least 150 Chinese fish vessels had turned off tracking systems so they could operate near the Galapagos Islands. In response in April last year, Chinas Bureau of Fisheries announced it would begin blacklisting vessels and captains found to have engaged in IUU fishing. Beijing has banned a number of vessels with its flag for IUU violations in the Pacific, but industry observers question the effectiveness of this, especially because Chinese vessels continue to go blind, switch off their tracking, while in the Pacific.

In the Pacific, much of the suspected IUU is in the unreported column, a result made up of a combination of illegal transshipping on the high seas “ when catches are transferred between vessels “ and corrupt or careless monitoring in Pacific ports. While China is the most cited IUU fisher, other nations, notably South Korea and Vanuatu, are also mentioned and IUU fishing remains a continuing problem even with small Pacific states as offenders.

Various studies have tried to give a value to IUU catches. A 2019 report by the World Resources Institute estimated that up to 7.2m tonnes of IUU fish valued at between US\$4.3bn to US\$8.3bn disappeared annually. The loss of so much fish to IUU fishing has long been a drain on the economies of small states without any other exports, as well as damaging to the global environment. The inability of Pacific nations to cope with IUU fishing has drawn the ire of rich importers, seeking certification of the legality of fish catches.

The EU gave Vanuatu a warning in 2012 over the role of IUU vessels carrying its flag. Facing the prospect of EU bans on its exports, Vanuatu reformed its regulations and was formally advised in 2016 that the warning had been lifted. But the country then found itself in trouble with the US over a fleet of apparently Taiwanese-owned vessels flying Vanuatus flag, including a ship called Tunago 61. In 2016, six of Tunago 61s Indonesian crew murdered the ship's captain while fishing east of Pitcairn Island.

They kept the body in the freezer and took it to Suva, Fiji, where they confessed to the crime. They said they had been working for 16 months without pay and without leaving the ship. Because the ship was flying under Vanuatus flag, Fiji flew the men to Vanuatu, a country they had never been to, where they were convicted and jailed for 18 years. They still sit in cells there.

Transform Aqorau, Solomon Islands ambassador to the US, who was responsible for driving through the Parties to the Nauru agreement, has argued that IUU fishing poses one of the biggest threats to fisheries management for developing countries. Flags of convenience and shell company operations in tax havens hide what is happening.

Most developing countries do not have the capacity to verify information provided by these vessels, Aqorau said. As a consequence there was an often substantial loss of income for poorer Pacific countries from IUU fishing, especially because it often involved traditional fishing grounds. The loss to developing countries is, therefore, not only expressed in economic terms by the lower licence fees paid, but also in resource terms, by the greater accessibility to the resource.

Thailand's new plan focuses on rehabilitation of fishermen livelihoods and migrants work permits

<https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/thailand-new-plan-focuses-on-rehabilitation-of-fishermen-livelihoods-and-migrants-work-permits-358715>

"The national committee on fisheries policy in Thailand has approved the 2020-2022 fisheries management plan, which is designed to ensure the development of a more sustainable and fishery sector, and the second national plan of action on IUU (NPOA-IUU).

The committee also endorsed measures that will ensure the fair, transparent and swift processing of IUU and related cases of forced labor and human trafficking, acknowledged the granting of 2.82- billion baht of funding, to rehabilitate the livelihoods of 188,134 fishermen, and the extension of work permits for migrant workers in the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan urged all authorities to maintain their efforts in curbing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and to enforce the laws strictly, to tackle forced labor and human trafficking in the sector.

During the meeting of the national committee on fisheries policy, he also emphasized the government's commitment to stamping out illegal fishing activities and promoting sustainable fishing.

Abandoned fishing nets in Thailand's oceans are being transformed into COVID-19 protective gear

<https://news.sky.com/story/abandoned-fishing-nets-in-thailands-oceans-are-being-transformed-into-covid-19-protective-gear-12318389>

"Abandoned fishing nets littering the ocean are being transformed into COVID-19 protective gear in Thailand. Environmentalists have been working with local fishing communities to rid the country's waters of the deadly rubbish. More than 700 fishers are taking part in the project and are being paid for the nets they collect.

Discarded fishing gear is the deadliest form of plastic debris for marine life, responsible for harming 66% of marine mammal species, half of seabird species and all species of sea turtles, according to a report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Up to one million tonnes enters the ocean every year. Campaigners for the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) have been working with members of 47 Thai fishing communities to collect the nets as well as finding ways to stop them from falling into the sea.

The group has also been carrying out clean-up dives with volunteers, one which Sky News joined. As the divers tipped out the bags they had managed to collect, dead crabs and other crustaceans tumbled out along with an old battery." "We find everything from [coral] to fish to a whole host of invertebrates," said Dr Rahul Mehrotra, marine scientist for Aow Thai Marine Ecology Centre (ATMEC), as he sifted through the piles. "

"We've found at least eight genera of fish which is hundreds of species so far. We're finding everything from crabs to large murex snails| these nets are designed specifically to entangle and catch marine life, so they are purpose-built to be very effective at that." The nets have to be cleaned and separated before being taken to a local recycling factory where they will be shredded and repurposed.

Some have been melted down and turned into COVID-19 protective visors and alcohol spray bottles. Money from some of the nets is being used to help villages involved in the project adapt to climate change."

"Their reception has been great because they have been the ones who have been exposed to the problem of marine plastic first-hand," Ms Pakchairatchakul said. ""They have seen how that affects their livelihoods, but our project has been providing them financial benefits as well. When they collect nets for us, they get paid by our recycling partners so that amount of payment goes to support their conservation projects, emergency funds or even their livelihood.""

Cyclone Yaas: Low-pressure area on Bay of Bengal may develop into cyclonic storm; landfall on 26 May, says IMD

<https://www.firstpost.com/india/cyclone-yaas-low-pressure-area-on-bay-of-bengal-may-develop-into-cyclonic-storm-landfall-on-26-may-says-imd-9640641.html>

"A low-pressure area, set to form over east-central Bay of Bengal on 22 May, is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm and strike the Odisha-West Bengal coast on 26 May, the Met department said on Thursday, sparking fears of another Amphan-like catastrophe.

Regional Met director GK Das said several places in Bengal are likely to experience light to moderate rainfall from 25 May, and isolated areas may encounter heavy showers. The intensity of rainfall may gradually increase, especially in the Gangetic belts.

The Met department has also warned of rough to very rough sea conditions. Fishermen in West Bengal have been advised against venturing into the sea for a few days from 23 May.

Those who are out with trawlers have been requested to return to the shore in the next two days. The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) said it is closely monitoring the developments on the Bay of Bengal, and has initiated preventive measures. "

"Coast Guard Dornier aircraft and ships are intimating the fishermen operating close to the shore and those at sea about the formation of cyclonic storm over Odisha-West Bengal coast, and directing them to return back to the harbour safely," an ICG official said. He said that radar stations at the ICG in West Bengal and Odisha have also started transmitting weather warnings at regular intervals, both in English and in vernacular language.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday held a high-level meeting with officials of the disaster management authority, district magistrates and police superintendents to review the preparations in place in the event of a cyclone. She has asked them to make necessary arrangements, while strictly following the COVID protocols.

The Amphan super cyclone, which struck Bengal in the third week of May last year, had claimed at least 98 lives and caused widespread destruction of property and infrastructure in the state's southern districts, including Kolkata, causing immense hardship to millions of people.

The prevailing low-pressure area, if it develops into a cyclone, will be christened 'Yaas', a name given by Oman, in accordance with a standard procedure. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), being a Regional Specialised Meteorological Centre (RSMC) -- one of the six in the world -- provide tropical cyclone and storm surge advisories to 13 countries, including Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The RSMC, New Delhi has released a list of names for tropical cyclones after taking into consideration suggestions made by these 13 member countries - all members of WMO/ESCAP (World Meteorological Organisation/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

ICSFs statement at 36th session of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission, (Virtual), Thailand, 5-7 May 2021

https://www.icsf.net/images/resources/statements/statements_icsf/182_ICSF_Statement_APFIC_36thSession.pdf.pdf

"The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) would like to thank the APFIC Secretariat for the invitation to participate in the virtual Thirty-Sixth Session of APFIC. Regarding Agenda items 1 and 3, ICSF would like to congratulate APFIC secretariat for organizing a series of Regional webinars, including on co-management of small-scale fisheries, and for the forthcoming one on gender in SSF/SSA fisheries/aquaculture.

ICSF strongly supports ground-up, contextual and evolutionary marine and inland community-based co-management projects and programmes in the region, focusing, among other things, on gender equity, paying special attention to fishers knowledge and institutions, and their tenure rights to land and water.

Community-based co-management structures, it is worth recalling, have proved more adaptable to meeting supply-side disruptions arising from SARS-CoV-2 protocols and the COVID-19 pandemic in several APFIC countries.

ICSF would urge the APFIC membership to further promote co-management in marine and inland fisheries, to apply the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines, and to promote and protect a human rights-based approach in all such initiatives.

ICSF believes that paying special attention to social development and decent work can contribute to effective fisheries management and sustainable development. ICSF welcomes the Report of the Seventy-seventh Executive Committee Meeting (Agenda Item 2) in regard to improving data to better reflect the current situation in the region.

Such data should include not only data on fisheries and aquaculture production, fishing fleet, area under aquaculture, employment, etc., but also gender disaggregated, sectoral data on human development of fishing communities, fishers, fishworkers, and aquaculture farmers, especially with regard to their access to education, health, sanitation, housing, nutrition and food security” to name a few.

Fisheries departments may be encouraged to collect such data from relevant ministries and departments, if needed. Broadening the scope of data in the above lines will also be useful to demonstrate how various targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to poverty eradication, food security, healthy lives and well-being and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources are met in relation to fishing and aquaculture communities.

If data permit, it will be further useful to see how far these SDG targets are threatened by climate change and extreme weather events. Agenda Item 4 (viz., regarding aquaculture innovation,

knowledge sharing and capacity development of developing countries in the APFIC region) draws attention to the capacity building needs or knowledge required for enhancing the sustainable growth of the sector.

ICSF is of the view that the capacity building needs should be broadened and complemented to identify those for enhancing social benefits of the vulnerable and marginalized fish farmers and dependent communities as well.

Moreover, occupational safety and health and social protection of all aquaculture workers should be guaranteed through the facilitation of decent work. In regard to the Agenda Item 6, ICSF supports the need to improve reporting of catch statistics to reliably indicate the status of harvested fish stocks in marine fisheries, as well as that of the status of associated and dependent species, within the framework of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries and respect for biodiversity and aquatic habitats, as well as traditional knowledge of fishers and fish farmers.

ICSF welcomes a basin approach to estimating fish stocks in riverine and floodplains fisheries, especially to understand the status and health of inland fisheries resources and to ensure equitable benefits flowing from the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity to all relevant stakeholders, particularly those disadvantaged downstream communities, sharing the basin.

ICSF welcomes the suggestion to move the Commission to a virtual mode and to enable its Member countries to participate in all APFIC meetings in a cost-effective manner. ICSF would request APFIC to use this opportunity also to strengthen the participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in its meetings, particularly of those that are active in small-scale, marine and inland fisheries and aquaculture.

Last but not the least, recognizing the contributions of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to employment, income, food security, and considering the cultural richness of small-scale fisheries along the value chain in the region, ICSF strongly recommends APFIC Member countries to celebrate the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Year 2022, especially with the active participation of men and women of fishing communities and local governments (IYAFA 2022).

It is an effective way to express solidarity with the small-scale fisheries and aquaculture communities and their food systems in the region. Full statement is available at:

https://www.icsf.net/images/resources/statements/statements_icsf/182_ICSF_Statement_APFIC_36thSession.pdf.pdf

Migrant fishers were coerced into working for more than two years without pay in Thailand

<https://www.hakaimagazine.com/news/facing-lockdown-at-sea/>

"Aung Aung was used to long voyages at sea. Not seeing his family for weeks on end was his usual routine. At age 13, Aung Aung moved from his native Myanmar (also known as Burma) to Ranong, Thailand, to work on fishing boats in the Andaman Sea. Now 28, a typical fishing trip means 25 straight days at sea with 34 other crew searching for mackerel, sardines, and red mullet for Thailand's fish markets and fish sauce manufacturers.

At the end of each voyage, he would usually return to Ranong for a brief two-day break with his wife and seven-year-old son. In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thai government declared a state of emergency and restricted travel and port access. Aung Aung was trapped in Kuraburi, Thailand, more than 120 kilometers from his home in Ranong. Because of the pandemic we couldn't travel, he says. We were stuck in Kuraburi for three months.

He and his coworkers continued to fish, but the typical two-day breaks on land, and any chance to see his family, disappeared. He was one of more than 400,000 seafarers stuck at sea because of border closures. Like other migrant workers around the world, fishers in Southeast Asia suffer unsafe conditions, ambiguous legal status, little to no union representation, and low wages. But during the ongoing pandemic, which has forced many people to limit their travel, fishers became uniquely vulnerable.

Their livelihoods depend on moving freely between vessels and across borders. But restrictions on movement left many of these workers at sea for seemingly endless voyages with little oversight or protection. Xenophobia and fear only compounded their struggles. In a televised address, Thailand's prime minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha, blamed the virus outbreak on workers from Burma, stirring up anti-Burmese sentiment in the region. Migrant workers in Taiwan reported being harassed and blamed for the pandemic.

Melissa Marschke, who studies the seafood industry in Southeast Asia at the University of Ottawa in Ontario, says that migrant workers often face unique restrictions, but under some pandemic travel rules migrant workers in Thailand were treated differently than native-born workers. Thais could travel under certain circumstances, but migrant workers couldn't move at all. Marschke, along with Peter Vandergeest, a political ecologist at York University in Ontario, recently examined how COVID-19 affected migrant fishers in Thailand and Taiwan, two of the largest hubs for the global seafood trade.

These countries supply all facets of the seafood market, from sashimi-grade ahi for Japan to trash fish for shrimp aquaculture, and myriad species for nearby fish markets. And all the canned tuna that flew off grocery shelves last year? Forty percent of the global supply was canned in Thailand, much of it caught by Taiwanese ships crewed by migrant fishers from all over Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and the Philippines.

While restrictions on movement have helped slow the spread of COVID-19, barring migrant fishers from going ashore for up to six months at a time deprived them of a range of necessities, Marschke and Vandergeest say. Trips ashore give fishers a respite from the monotony of life at sea. But ports are also where they can access crucial supports: Wi-Fi to call family, opportunities to submit labor complaints, and a chance to seek medical care.

Lennon Ying-Dah Wong, a director at the Serve the People Association in Taiwan, notes that many of the ships that kept workers at sea for months in Taiwans waters were sailing under flags of convenience, which enables vessels to be registered in a country other than that of the ships owners. The contentious, but legal, practice is used by owners to circumvent safety standards, pay lower wages, or reduce taxes. Marschke and Vandergeest add that if the contracts of fishers lapsed while they were trapped at sea, workers became unsure of their rights. Routine government inspections of fishing vessels were also often waived, resulting in less oversight of working conditions.

To Vandergeest, COVID-19 only added to the ways fishers have been marginalized for decades. Fishing is remote, hard to observe, and often obfuscated by governments and industry. Scandals of extreme abuse are common, the most notable being rampant slavery on Thai boats, which was revealed by The Guardian in 2014. Migrant fishers were coerced into working for more than two years without pay.

Workers on some boats stayed because of violence, or because boat owners kept promising they would pay at the next port, but never did. Industry regulators are also typically more focused on fish than workers, says Vandergeest. Historically, its all been about fishing management, and maybe environmental issues, but the workers have simply been invisible.

While the border restrictions eventually loosened, fishers like Aung Aung remain vulnerable. His salary is just 12,500 Thai baht per month, about US \$400, which is low for the region. Aung Aung can now see his wife and son in Ranong, but he still spends over 330 days a year at sea. What does he think about on those trips? I miss my family. I miss the Burmese food, since I dont like the meals on the boat too much. I really miss home.

COVID-19 and small-scale fisheries in Southeast Asia: Impacts and Responses

<http://www.asianfisheriessociety.org/publication/downloadfile.php?id=1355&file=Y0dSbUx6QXIOekU0TkRRd01ERTJNVGswTURZME1qa3VjR1Jt>

"This new paper describes the impacts of and responses to COVID-19 of small-scale fisheries in six selected countries in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The paper used a structured case study approach to analyse the impacts and responses and relied heavily on existing reports and data sources in each country.

The pandemic has further revealed the vulnerability of small-scale fishing households in the region. Given the few assets of fisher households, their ability to cushion the negative impact of crises and shocks is limited.

Fishers made adaptive responses such as direct fish marketing, online marketing, and home delivery services. While short-term responses of providing food and financial assistance have been helpful, long-term support to address pandemics such as COVID-19 and other stressors will require developing more resilient fishing households.

The paper recommends several approaches and interventions to improve household resilience and to be better prepared for similar challenges and threats in the future.

These include: i) strengthening the fishing households social network of friends, relatives, and neighbours to serve as both a social safety net and a bridge towards the transition to financial inclusion; ii) diversifying livelihood to reduce dependency on the fishery and provide for additional sources of income and food; iii) promoting financial inclusion through savings, credit, digital payment products, and insurance; iv) value chain upgrading through post-harvest fish handling and processing methods; and, v) providing access, especially for women, to social protection measures such as government health insurance and social security.

Thai fishing industry hit hard by shortage of migrant workers

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2105199/trats-fishing-industry-hit-hard-by-shortage-of-migrant-workers>

"The fishing industry in this eastern province has been seriously affected by the shortage of migrant workers since the border between Thailand and Cambodia was closed to stem the Covid-19 pandemic, a fishing boat owner said on Sunday.

Boonmee Apibansri, who owns four fishing boats, said although there are still some Cambodian migrant workers remaining in the province, they are few and far between.

The border closure due to Covid-19 has made it difficult for Cambodian migrants to return to Thailand to work, he said. Sometimes fishing boats have to leave the shore with only a few crewmen, who must therefore work harder than usual.

When the crew are back to the shore, their ability to relax is limited by the requirement to wear face masks, avoid crowded places and follow other restrictions, he said. Apart from the shortage of migrant workers, the fishing industry has been hit by low fish prices due to weak demand, resulting in a drop in revenue such that it is difficult to meet fuel and labour costs, Mr Boonmee said.

How COVID-19 affects the fishing industry

<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/fishing-industry/>

"The global seafood market is a huge industry that employs millions of people. Valued at \$159 billion in 2019, it will grow to almost \$200 billion by 2027. The system is a network of formal and informal producers and distributors, retailers and consumers. In low-income countries, the fishing industry is especially important as a way to reduce poverty. Developing countries employ 97% of the people, directly and indirectly, working in the fishing industry. About 90% of the fishing workforce are small-scale fishermen. By exporting seafood, low-income countries can boost their economies through the oceanic sector.

The fishing industry also helps to increase nutrition and food security for the impoverished. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has devastated the fishing industry, just as it has most other industries. The pandemic has disrupted supply chains and lowered demand, reducing profits in the industry. Lockdowns and curfews have also reduced catch sizes, which in turn means that fisherfolk make less per day of work.

What they do not sell often goes to waste as cold storage is expensive and not widely available to small-scale fishermen. The most affected groups are small and medium-scale fisheries, especially in rural areas, as they lack the resources that large-scale fisheries have to be able to transition and adapt during COVID-19. Furthermore, they do not have the safety net of social protection programs that large-scale fisheries may have.

Many developing countries with large fishing sectors have been struggling to offset the effects of COVID-19. In Thailand and India, migrant fish workers were met with lockdowns and nowhere to sell their products. Traders in India and Myanmar reported a 15% drop in fish prices post-lockdowns. In China, a shift to frozen and processed seafood left fresh-catch fishers floundering. Besides the loss of income, supply chain disruptions have led to a reduction in fish consumption in low-income countries.

Fish is very important to the global food chain as it represents a nutritious source of food that is often more affordable than meat or poultry. The FAO estimates that in 2016, fish provided about 3.2 billion people with almost 20% of their average intake of animal protein, with an even higher proportion in low-income countries.

But, as household incomes have decreased due to lockdowns, people around the world have bought less fish. Small-scale farmers in Myanmar, a country with a large fishing sector, have reported buying less animal-sourced food and shifting toward staple foods during the pandemic.

There is a diminished supply of fish available for those in low-income countries, which makes a once staple food in low-income households, a food that is no longer available. It is also unaffordable because the lower supply means that fish prices are seeing a sharp rise, which puts

fish products out of reach for the impoverished. This situation directly impacts overall nutrition in low-income households.

Luckily, there are many organizations working to address this global issue. PROBLUE, a Multi-Donor Trust Fund run by the World Bank, helps countries develop their oceanic sectors with the goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing the quality of life of the impoverished in a sustainable way. Under the umbrella of PROBLUE, there are other trust funds focusing on more targeted issues. One of them is PROFISH, which focuses on maximizing the economic benefits of fisheries in developing countries. It works to capture the sunken billions” an estimated \$80 billion that is lost every year by the fishing industry.

PROFISH does this by designing and implementing good governance systems through investments and partnerships as well as providing knowledge to those in the aquaculture sectors on how to create sustainable wealth and improve the efficiency of the fishing industry. If efficiency increases, millions of impoverished people in the fishing industry could improve their economic circumstances.

PROFISH has been put in place in developing countries all around the world that hold an opportunity for the fishing sector to dramatically improve. Future of Fish is a nonprofit working to directly mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the fishing industry in South America.

In Peru, it works with other NGOs, fishermen, chefs and local media to increase demand for seafood to offset the pandemic drops. It has used social media to facilitate buying and selling and supported transport logistics to help move fish from the coast to market centers and customers. It also launched a campaign to supply small fishing villages with the protective equipment needed to safely sell seafood products.

Future of Fish also runs on-the-ground initiatives to help fishermen export their catches. In Peru, the mahi mahi fishery is the second-largest artisanal fishery, Future of Fish has implemented traceability programs along all steps of the supply chain to make sure that the catches can be verified as Best Choice by Seafood Watch, and therefore, be accepted into the U.S. by the FDA.

Creative solutions are also popping up. Developed by USAID as part of the Fish Right project, online fish markets in the Philippines allow fisherfolk to maintain their main source of income. Fish Tiangge is an online marketplace that connects 6,000 fisherfolk with consumers from more than 300,000 households.

By connecting fishers and consumers online, the U.S. government is helping to protect fisherfolk income and prevent a food crisis, while ensuring that conservation measures are not compromised in areas that are hard-hit by COVID-19, says U.S. ambassador, Sung Kim.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the lives of fisherfolk across the globe. Fortunately, governments and organizations are working to help them by creating lasting impacts that will

remain even when the COVID-19 pandemic is over. With the sustained investment of the global community, the fishing industry can reach its full potential as a vehicle for poverty reduction.

Chinese dams unleash Mekong waters on Laos during dry season

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/dams-04052021175346.html>

"Chinese dams on the Mekong River have begun releasing water during the rivers normal dry season, causing trouble for wildlife, farmers and fishermen in Laos, sources in the Southeast Asian country told RFA. The Mekong River water level is up 12 centimeters [4.7 inches] from yesterday, an official of the Natural Resources and Environment Department of Laos northwestern Bokeo province told RFAs Lao Service April 2.

According to the official, the water level in Bokeo was at 2.52 meters (99.2 inches) on April 2. I think the Chinese dams might be releasing water, but Im not sure because Ive not been officially informed, the official said. Fluctuating water levels in Southeast Asia's most important waterway pose threats to aquatic plants and fish, which thousands of people living along the Mekong in Laos rely on for their livelihood.

A fisherman from Laos northwestern Xayaburi province told RFA that a sudden change in water level was bad for fish stocks. The Mekong River has risen about 10 centimeters [four inches]. Im concerned that the rising water will affect aquatic vegetation and fish, the fisherman said. Before, the water was thick and rich in sediment.

Now it is clear and has fewer fish. The fish are reproducing less and less these days. During this time of year, the fish lay their eggs, but when the water rushes through, it washes them all away, said the fisherman.

A farmer from the same province said the unpredictable water levels made his work difficult. The water level depends on Chinese dams, and the waterflow is not natural. It's hard to make a living on the river these days, the farmer said. In the capital Vientiane, a vegetable garden owner told RFA that the increased water level was good for some industries but bad for others.

The water level is up by about one ladder step over the past two days. That's good for boat navigation, but bad for fishing and vegetable planting. I grow peanuts on a sand bed that is about to be flooded, the gardener said.

Montree Chanthawong, a Thailand-based Mekong River expert, told RFA that the rivers water level is not supposed to rise during the dry season. The rising water could hurt aquatic species like fish and aquatic vegetation. Some of them could even die.

Sparrows lay their eggs on the sand beds too, and when the water level rises these can become flooded, he said. Nowat Roykaew, the president of the Thailand-based Chiang Khong

Conservation Group, told RFA that water levels in the Mekong have been fluctuating since January.

Sometimes it goes up a lot like right now. I notice that the rising water is now clear. That means the water is coming from Chinese dams, because if it came from rain, it would be turbid. The water fluctuation has broken down the whole eco-system, he said.

Data from the Washington-based Stimson Centers Mekong Dam Monitor project indicated that during the week of March 29 to April 4, five Chinese dams released water. Don Sahong Dam in southern Laos also released water during the same period.

During its update for the week of March 22-28, the Monitor said that river levels at Chiang Saen, Thailand had continued to rise. This is not normal for this time of the year and is a result of significant upstream dam releases from China's cascade, the update said, adding that releases would likely continue in the coming months.

The update also reported that Thai conservationists had recently posted photos of migratory bird nests and eggs along the riverbanks to show that a 50 cm (20 inch) rise in the water level would submerge the nests.

That rise is likely to come over the next month given upstream releases. This is just one example of how altering the river's natural cycle of dry season lows and wet season highs is killing the river's natural resource base, the update said.

China has drawn criticism from its downstream neighbors for its cascade of 11 mega-dams on the Mekong River, with the lower Mekong basin experiencing severe drought over the past year and some stretches of the river even drying up entirely.

In October 2020, Beijing agreed to share data with the Mekong River Commission, as some 60 million people in MRC members Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam use the river for agriculture and fishing.

Neighbors of Laos have also complained about its nearly 80 dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries under the country's controversial economic strategy to become the Battery of Southeast Asia by selling hydropower to neighbors.

The Royal Thai Government launches with UNDP support a new climate change adaptation project financed by the Green Climate Fund

<https://reliefweb.int/report/thailand/royal-thai-government-launches-undp-support-new-climate-change-adaptation-project>

"Over 80 participants representing the Thai government, academia, non-governmental organisations and the private sector convened at the Pullman Hotel in Bangkok for the launch of

the Green Climate Fund (GCF) financed programme titled ""Increasing resilience to climate change impacts in marine and coastal areas along the Gulf of Thailand."" The GCF approved a USD \$3 million grant for Thailand (to be implemented by UNDP) over a four-year period starting August 2020.

This programme was developed in collaboration between the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, both under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) and UNDP in Thailand.

The programme was launched with key partners discussing its concept, objectives and expected outcomes and the overall implementation plan. Thailand's coastal zones are rich with biodiversity, marine life and mangroves that are distributed along both coasts of Thailand's 24 provinces. With Thailand located in the monsoon region, it is highly susceptible to extreme climate events, such as sea-level rise, flooding, cyclones and erosion.

Healthy mangrove systems offer tremendous protection to coastal communities against storm surge and coastal erosion; they are also critical nursery areas that help support local fisheries and overall marine biodiversity. With over 1 million tourists visiting Phang Nga Bay annually, Thailand is working to protect and adapt its marine and coastal areas to the onsets of climate change. Climate change will impact local tourism, agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture and natural resources while creating additional stress on land and water resources.

To address this issue, this new programme will support the Kingdom of Thailand to advance climate change adaptation planning in relation to marine and coastal areas in the Gulf of Thailand. In addition, the programme aims to contribute towards several Sustainable Development Goals as outlined in the 2030 Agenda, including gender-responsive solutions to reduce disaster risks, enabling climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The new GCF-financed programme is an important contribution to Thailand implementing its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) that was finalized in 2018. Throughout the implementation of Thailand's NAP, the programme will utilize best practices and information from other interventions, such as the Safe Marine for Life Project implemented by Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, and will meaningfully expand the knowledge and regulatory framework, particularly for the sub-national levels.

The programme will ensure close coordination among provincial level agencies to set aside budget for fishermen and farmers along coastal areas to better adapt to natural disasters, such as tropical storms and keeping beaches clean in order to maintain eco-friendly tourist destinations. I hope this programme will serve as a mechanism for cooperation among our two agencies and drive the implementation of the adaptation process considering climate change factors along Thailand's coastal areas to create climate resilience.

This will also contribute Thailand's 20-year strategy as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, said Raweewan Bhuridej, Secretary-General of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning. Within the framework of Thailand's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, climate change adaptation is noted as being a top priority in Thailand's national response to climate change.

To date, Thailand's GCF-financed programme has focused on NAP preparation, national climate risk modeling and a vulnerability analysis. UNDP is a long-time partner to Thailand when it comes to climate action and we have been working with Thai partners at both policy level but also with local communities, on both mitigation and adaptation measures.

This new GCF-funded project is timely and will provide a great platform to apply the Bio-Circular-Green development model promoted by Thailand as part of the COVID-19 recovery, said Renaud Meyer, Resident Representative of UNDP in Thailand during the launch event.

He also emphasized the need to redefine the relationship between humans and nature to ensure a win-win cohabitation. Involving the coastal communities in this effort is both urgent and required to strengthen the resilience of Thailand, safeguard progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and sustain efforts towards sustainability. At the country level, the ONEP will act as a key government agency to coordinate and seek collaboration from 12 other relevant government agencies of Thailand.

The programme seeks to build additional partnerships with interested development partners, including international organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector. Linkages will be made to this programme through integrated approaches to mainstreaming and piloting adaptation responses in key NAP sectors, including tourism, agriculture, health, and human settlements.

Seaspiracy film assails fishing and aquaculture sectors that seem ready for a good fight

<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/seaspiracy-film-assails-fishing-and-aquaculture-sectors-that-seem-ready-for-a-good-fight/>

"Seaspiracy, a documentary-styled film released on Netflix this week, intends to shock, and on that count it succeeds. The 90-minute expose shows ocean pollution and its vast effects on marine life; it displays grotesque images of dolphins and whales being slaughtered and of vast bycatch species dying, alleging that commercial fisheries have little regard for marine animals and birds; and it outright dismisses aquaculture for its use of marine ingredients and for what it says are poor culture environments.

With the financial backing of Hollywood star and environmental activist Leonardo DiCaprio, Seaspiracy follows in the footsteps of the similarly produced film Cowsspiracy, released in 2014.

Like its predecessor, this new film's clear aim is to turn viewers off of animal proteins in favor of plant-based diets.

It doesn't pull any punches in doing so, alleging: -- That the oceans will be empty of fish in 27 years and will become a barren wasteland-- That aquacultures use of fishmeal and fish oil in feeds reduces it to wild fishing in disguise-- That farmed salmon are raised in lice-plagued waters and the fish are swimming in circles in their own filth-- Dismisses the concept of sustainable seafood entirely-- That the best action is to abstain from any seafood consumption whatsoever.

To make his case, director Ali Tabrizi exhibits victims of forced labor on fishing vessels, notably those from previously documented cases in Thailand. One person who survived tells of physical abuse and the constant threat of death from vessel operators. Tabrizi also takes on the leading seafood certification group, the Marine Stewardship Council, and concludes that its blue label is purely financially motivated. He describes a shroud of secrecy hanging over the seafood industry that's aimed at controlling and protecting the financial interests of seafood producers.

While MSC did not answer his questions on film, it issued a response upon the film's release: There is a crisis in our oceans, and an urgent need to end overfishing. However, it is wrong to claim that there is no such thing as sustainable fishing and that the only solution to stop eating fish. Some of the problems that the film highlights "bycatch, overfishing and destruction of marine ecosystems" are precisely the issues the MSC certification process is designed to address.

MSC was not alone in voicing its discontent with the film, which the New York Times panned, calling it lost in a sea of murky conspiratorial thinking. Seafood producers, service providers and industry associations around the world swiftly came out in defense of fishing and aquaculture. In the days prior to *Seaspiracy's* release the United States-based National Fisheries Institute said it appealed to Netflix to distinguish between legitimate documentaries and propaganda.

The concern with some slickly produced propaganda pieces, masquerading as documentaries, is that audiences will not recognize the film's true agenda [as] a vegan indoctrination movie, the organization said in a statement.

We know the producer is trying to convince an audience not to eat seafood. He's gone into filmmaking with a desired outcome for his audience, and that's not documentary making, it's propaganda, Gavin Gibbons, VP, communications at NFI, told the Advocate. We know from Tabrizi's previous movies, *Cowspiracy* and *What The Health*, that the facts are very relative when it comes to this filmmaker.

Soon after its release, NFI began debunking some of the key arguments the film makes. The idea that the oceans will be empty by 2048 is based on a completely debunked 2006 statistic, refuted

by the author of the original study. The 2048 statistic was put to rest by a follow-up report in the journal Science released in 2009 under the title New hope for fisheries, it noted.

UK-based Seafish promptly listed 10 reasons to feel good about buying seafood, saying, films like this are designed to shock and it doesn't always suit to highlight the good work that is happening (in the UK and beyond) to ensure our fisheries are managed sustainably.

Seaspiracy director Tabrizi interviews Richard Oppenlander, owner of a vegan company and animal rescue sanctuary, who endorses the call to ban fishing in 30 percent of the oceans by 2030 based on his calculation that less than 1 percent of our oceans are being regulated, a point that NFI retorted is not only inaccurate, it's nonsensical.

In his coverage of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in Africa, Tabrizi claims that one in every three wild caught fish imported into the United States were caught illegally and therefore sold illegally, a statistic that prominent U.S. fisheries researcher Ray Hilborn wrote was not credible, and that the retraction of the approach has been a long, drawn-out process.

Thai Union partners with The Nature Conservancy on anti-IUU initiative

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/thai-union-partners-with-the-nature-conservancy-on-anti-iuu-initiative>

"Thai Union has committed to full transparency in its international tuna supply chain by 2025. The Bangkok, Thailand-based seafood company, which notched more than USD 4.1 billion (EUR 3.3 billion) in revenue in 2019, signed a partnership with The Nature Conservancy on Wednesday, 3 March, committing to full supply-chain transparency across its global tuna supply chains.

The move will require Thai Union to install electronic monitoring on all of its partnered fishing vessels in their supply chains, including onboard video cameras, GPS, and sensors to automatically track activities onboard. These requirements may be substituted or augmented by human observers, it said in a press release.

Thai Union has also pledged to implement a fish-aggregating device (FAD) management plan that mitigates environmental risks posed no later than 2025. The commitment has the potential to push the entire industry in a more sustainable direction by addressing widespread illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing practices, according to The Nature Conservancy. ""We are very excited about the potential of this partnership to shift the sustainability needle across the entire canned seafood sector.

The Nature Conservancy CEO Jennifer Morris said. Consumers and retailers send powerful signals when they choose sustainable products, and TNC hopes this commitment will catalyze rapid growth in electronic monitoring and transparency in fisheries all over the world."" The

partnership between the environmental non-governmental organization and Thai Union also calls for the two entities jointly pushing governments, regulators, and supply chain actors to encourage greater monitoring of other fisheries in which Thai Union is involved, including European wild caught sprat, mackerel, herring, and whiting.

The Nature Conservancy said Thai Unions commitment was significant and timely, given the ongoing suspension of onboard observer coverage in the fishing area managed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Despite that, the NGO said fishing effort has only decreased by 4 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic while demand for canned tuna has surged, resulting in a 41 percent increase in wholesale tuna prices over the past year."

"Electronic monitoring creates transparency critical to consumers having confidence that their seafood products have been harvested legally, sustainably, and without labor abuses, The Nature Conservancy Large-Scale Fisheries Program Director Mark Zimring said. Effective monitoring contributes vital data, the current absence of which makes regulation of even the most vulnerable fisheries difficult.

By partnering with one of the biggest players in the seafood supply sector to plug this data gap, Thai Union and TNC have a real chance to achieve durable change at a global scale."

"In their joint statement, Thai Union and The Nature Conservancy said better fisheries monitoring will help reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overfishing, and bycatch of sharks and turtles."

"Thai Union has made significant strides in making sustainability a key attribute of our company, from the creation of our global sustainability strategy, SeaChange, to partnering with leading organizations like The Nature Conservancy, Thai Union President and CEO Thiraphong Chansiri said.

We understand that change does not happen in a vacuum; It is through collaboration and partnership that we shape the future. Change takes more than a wish and well-crafted words “ those that are in a leadership position must define the path forward through actions and results. I look forward to the sustainable future Thai Union and TNC can help create through increased electronic monitoring and transparency throughout the seafood industry.”"

Fishers caught in COVID-19 net, sink into poverty

<https://phys.org/news/2021-03-fishers-caught-covid-net-poverty.html>

"Lockdown restrictions following the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted fishing operations, processing, markets and supply chains, leaving those in low-income groups vulnerable to malnutrition and poverty, say the authors of a new study. When the pandemic caused global lockdowns in March 2020 it disrupted the fish market supply chain on a

global level, the ripple effects of which continue to be felt. The decline in demand for fresh fish has led to fewer wage opportunities while increased costs of transportation have led to either oversupply or wastage.

The global seafood market reached a value of US\$159.31 billion in 2019, and is projected to reach about US\$194 billion dollars by 2027. The study notes that the seafood system is a meshed network of formal and informal producers and distributors, retailers and consumers. Developing countries, in particular, are exporting high volumes of seafood as part of poverty alleviation programs. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the developing world employ 97 percent of the world's fishing workforce with an overwhelming majority, 90 percent, are small-scale fishermen. The Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that about 200 million people were directly and indirectly employed along the value chain many of whom are women.

Published online by Global Food Security in February, the study highlights labor and production disruptions that affected the incomes of self-employed and casual workers based on analysis of data collected from official government agencies and market reporting. The entry of migrant fish workers into ports, in Thailand and India for example, were restricted while most fish markets were shut down.

Traders in India and Myanmar reported a 15 percent drop in fish prices after lockdowns were implemented. Though large-scale operators were eventually able to adapt, smaller operations especially from rural areas have had a harder time recovering due to limited access to technology and social protection programs.

Businesses in China, for example, shifted to frozen and processed seafood in response to consumers staying home and cooking more. Small to medium enterprises had a more difficult time pivoting without access to a network of consumers online and a reliable transportation system. ""With market disruptions people are not that likely to be fishing more, because they can't sell the product. One way to support the loss of income is setting up COVID-safe markets, through mobile apps for example, to minimize crowds.

This has already been going on in the Philippines,"" explains Kate Barclay, professor of International Studies and Global Societies, University of Technology Sydney. The disruptions led to a significant reduction in consumption of nutrient-dense foods like fish in low-income countries, with households shifting towards staple foods, according to the study. Small-scale farmers in Myanmar reported buying less food, especially animal-sourced food.

Since the fish sector is important in maintaining the global food chain, the authors of the study recommend longer-term adaptations over short-term coping mechanisms to safeguard against future volatilities. These include more investment in sustainable fishing and less reliance on food imports. ""Fish and other aquatic animals are a nutritious source of food, one that tends to be more affordable than meat or poultry.

When we think about how to recover from this pandemic there needs to be more investment and support given that this sector is an important source of livelihood for so many people,"" says Ben Belton, a co-author of the study and senior scientist at WorldFish. Belton also suggests social safety nets targeted at low-income groups and migrant workers."

"In a crisis like this there's actually very little formal support that people are able to access. If you lose your job or you're unable to continue your business, you don't have many options and may be forced to borrow informally. But if there were more of a social safety net in times of need, whether it be in the form of cheap loans or food, it could at least provide a bit of a buffer,"" says Belton.

One of the challenges for government and policy makers is identifying what kinds of support are effective at preserving businesses, income and food security while balancing sustainable practices. ""Policy measures taken to help fishers through these extremely difficult times should be designed to respond to the specific problems in a given context, and should keep the long-term sustainability of the sector in mind,"" says Alice Tipping, lead of fish subsidies at the International Institute for Sustainable Development."

"If a country is facing a drop off in fish supply because fishers are subject to lockdowns, providing general income support to the poorest sectors of the population may be the measure that best addresses the problem,"" Tipping says. ""If fishers are able to fish but demand is lacking, for example because restaurants are closed, the best way of supporting fishers is to give them money directly, rather than trying to prop them up by further reducing their fishing costs which is likely to encourage them to fish more than may be sustainable,"" she adds.

New negotiations head optimistic on WTO

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2069395/negotiations-head-optimistic-on-wto>

"With a new director-general installed, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is expected to restore confidence in the multilateral trading system and help accelerate global economic recovery following the pandemic, says Thailand's trade negotiations chief.

According to Auramon Supthaweethum, director-general to Trade Negotiations Department under the Commerce Ministry, the new director-general is expected to speed up WTO's internal reforms to improve awareness of trade situations and deal with the economic recovery from the pandemic.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who was formerly finance minister of Nigeria on two occasions, was appointed Monday to be the seventh director-general of the WTO. She is the first African and the first woman to lead the body, which governs trade rules between nations.

Ms Okonjo-Iweala is taking a helm of the beleaguered intergovernmental organisation as it faces a slew of challenges that have hobbled the WTO in recent years, including how to best manage the increased friction between economic superpowers the US and China.

Ms Okonjo-Iweala is scheduled to officially take over the WTO's top post on March 1. Her term is set to go through August 2025. "The new WTO director-general is expected to bring back confidence in the WTO and drive further progress on the long suspension of WTO negotiations.

It will be a positive effect on Thailand and we would like to see the moving forward of WTO effectively again," said Mrs Auramon. "The new chief is also expected to accelerate unlocking the WTO's dysfunctional dispute settlement system and push for the appointment of vacant members in the appellate body, which has an important role in protecting members' rights," she said. The appellate body is a seven-member group that functions as the WTO's highest adjudicator. Their terms expired in December 2019.

With the new director-general, Mrs Auramon said the WTO is expected to help members gain easier access to vaccines, medical supplies and essential products for the pandemic. Members hope to complete negotiations on fisheries subsidies during the 12th WTO ministerial conference (MC12) later this year, according to Mrs Auramon.

The fish subsidy discussions, ongoing since 2001, aim at cutting billions of dollars in subsidies that contribute to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Mekong river at worrying low level amid calls for more Chinese dam data

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/mekong-river-at-worrying-low-level-amid-calls-for-more-chinese-dam-data-101613137861375.html>

"Water levels in the Mekong River have fallen to a "worrying level" in part due to outflow restrictions from Chinese hydropower dams upstream, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) said on Friday, calling on Beijing to share all of its water data.

The vital waterway has turned blue along the Thai-Laos border, from its usual murky brown colour - signaling shallow water and low levels of nutrition-rich sediment - partially from outflow restrictions from the Jinghong dam in China's Yunnan province, the inter-governmental MRC said. Friday's statement said low rainfall and dams on the Lower Mekong and tributaries also contributed to the drop in levels."

"There have been sudden rises and falls in water levels immediately downstream of Jinghong and further down to Vientiane," said Winai Wongpimool, director of the MRC Secretariat's Technical Support Division. Such fluctuations affect fish migration, agriculture and transportation that nearly 70 million people rely on for their livelihoods and food security."

"To help the Lower Mekong countries manage risks more effectively, we call on China and the Lower Mekong countries themselves to share their water release plans with us," Winai said. The MRC said normal conditions may be restored if large volumes of water are released from Chinese dams' reservoirs.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs disputed the MRC's findings, adding that there are many causes of downstream drought. China last year pledged to share data from its dams with MRC member countries Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. In January, Beijing notified neighbours that its dams were filling reservoirs until Jan. 25.

Outflow levels at Jinghong Dam were 785 cubic metres per second in early-January before rising to 1,400 cubic metres per second in mid-January, the MRC said. However, levels dropped again in February and were 800 cubic metres per second as of Thursday, the MRC said.

The statement did not mention any recent notification from Beijing. China said the dam's outflow has been consistently more than 1,000 cubic meters per second since the end of January, a level it says is nearly twice the natural flow of the river. It called on the MRC "to avoid causing public misunderstanding".

This Thai village created a tiny fish reserve years ago. Today, its thriving

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2021/01/thai-village-created-tiny-fish-reserve-25-years-ago-today-its-thriving/>

"PEOPLE in Na Doi, a quiet village in northwest Thailand, noticed that their fish catches in the nearby Ngao River were declining. The fish they did manage to net were also getting smaller. Together, Na Doi's 75 households decided to try a radical solution: they would set aside a small stretch of river to be strictly off-limits to fishing.

Nearly a quarter-century later, the experiment has paid off. The protected section of the Ngao brims with large barb and mahseer (a kind of carp), and catches outside of the reserve, where the villagers fish, have significantly increased. The projects shared ownership has created a greater sense of harmony and unity among villagers, and has benefited them individually, psychologically as well, says Nok Wa, 55, a farmer in Na Doi. Many times, when people in the village are upset, they go to watch the fish, he says. Sometimes the young children ask why we can't eat those fish, and I tell them, "Our stomachs cannot eat those fish, but our eyes can still eat.

Na Doi was the second village in the Ngao River valley to adopt this pioneering approach to freshwater fisheries management. Since the late 1990s, at least 50 other villages there have done the same. As a whole, the entirely grassroots-led reserves have been stunningly successful, according to findings recently published in *Nature*. Most importantly, the Thailand case study

provides probably the best real-world proof of concept that fisheries reserves can benefit not just oceans, but freshwater, too. These small, community-based reserves can be a really effective management strategy for sustaining their own resources and conserving fish, says Aaron Koning, a postdoctoral researcher at the Global Water Center at the University of Reno, Nevada, and a National Geographic explorer.

This is some of the first science to show that this approach is really effective in freshwater, and suggests that we should maybe start applying this as a conservation tool. A much-needed break Such tools are desperately needed. Freshwater animals are declining at rates more than double those of land and marine ones, yet they're chronically overlooked. Their habitats in many rivers are affected by myriad threats: from dams and irrigation diversions, pollution, sand mining, and invasive species.

While freshwater reserves will not solve everything, in places where fish populations are under pressure, they can give species much-needed breathing room to rebuild their numbers, ultimately making them better able to weather other environmental assaults. Larger populations are less likely to go extinct than smaller ones, and are also more adaptable due to higher genetic diversity. Freshwater reserves provide a tool that could buy us some time to start addressing much larger conservation strategies, Koning says.

Southeast Asia, which has rivers and lakes that are some of the most heavily fished in the world, also has a long history of self-governed freshwater reserves, usually established as sacred pools around religious temples. The first Ngao River valley community reserve was established in 1992, and slowly, other villages" observing the success of their neighbors" replicated the project.

The rules are usually simple: no fishing of any kind in an agreed-upon area demarcated by flags or signs. Punishments for violators vary. In Na Doi, for example, fines start at 500 baht (about \$17) per fish, regardless of the animal's size, and increase for subsequent offenses. In another village, rule breakers must pay with 12 bottles of whiskey and a pig sacrifice to appease the spirits.

Accidental networks: In 2012, Koning, then a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, began investigating the Ngao valley reserves to see how widespread and successful they truly were. Over the next eight years, he spent a total of 18 months living with communities across the region, where he documented around 50 different reserves. He selected 23 to study in depth, interviewing villagers and snorkeling the waters inside and outside the reserves to count and measure fish, along with study co-author Martin Perales.

Koning found, not surprisingly, that older and bigger reserves were more successful, because they offered more time and space" including more kinds of habitat" in which to rebuild fish populations and re-establish rare species. But even reserves established in the last couple years showed clear benefits from being spared intense fishing pressure. Reserves that were located

closer to a village tended to have an advantage, Koning says, probably because villagers were better able to enforce the rules.

These principles have been much more fully developed and demonstrated in marine reserves, but we think that what might be driving the success that we saw in our study, too, Koning says. While some of the reserves are laughably small, he says "just the size of a kiddie pool" they are all relatively close together, inadvertently providing a network of safe havens for fish species that travel up and down the river and its tributaries, in addition to those that stay put.

The magnitude of the overall benefits is really surprising, Koning says. He and his colleagues reported that, compared to non-protected stretches of the river, reserves enjoy more than twice the total number of fish and over 20 times the total weight of fish, with big fish found almost exclusively within protected areas.

This is the first time we have had such a high-profile, quantitative study that's directly measuring the benefits of freshwater protected areas, says Erin Loury, a fisheries biologist at FISHBIO, a global fisheries and environmental consulting company, who was not involved in the research. The fact that communities did this on their own with very little external support or funding is quite remarkable and is the best-case scenario you could hope for.

Hard-to-see successes In follow-up studies, Loury would like to see an in-depth analysis of the social factors that contributed to the communities' accomplishments. She wonders, for example, if the Thai reserves benefited from the fact that villagers could literally see their successful efforts swimming around in the clear waters of the Ngao River.

When freshwater bodies are turbid" which many are" the gains from fishing limits may be harder to convey. Since the study came out, Koning has received reports about similar initiatives in Malaysia, India, and Namibia. Conservationists have also contacted him about replicating successful aspects of the Thai case study in various countries in South America and Southeast Asia.

At the same time, he has begun researching the effects of eight large, government-mandated, no-take zones established in 2013 in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, a hugely important fishery where reports indicate fewer and smaller fish are being caught. By comparing different systems and approaches around the world, Koning and his colleagues hope to identify common factors for success that could be tailored to diverse rivers and lakes.

There's a ton of mystery still in how and why these things work, but the first lesson is that they do work, Koning says. It's a message that Nok Wa heartedly endorses as well. If we didn't have a reserve, our children wouldn't be able to see fish, and we wouldn't have fish to eat, he says. If a community starts a reserve, they will definitely get more fish.

Fisheries department strengthens hygiene measures at Thailand's seafood factories

<https://thethaiger.com/coronavirus/fisheries-department-strengthens-hygiene-measures-at-thailands-seafood-factories>

"Thailand's Fisheries Department has tightened hygiene measures in the country's seafood factories in a bid to allay the fears of consumers and exporters. The current Covid-19 outbreak in Thailand started at a fish market in the central province of Samut Sakhon last month. Vicharn Ingrisawang from the Fisheries Department says that since then, some consumers and exporters have voiced concerns over the safety of Thai fish and seafood products.

Nation Thailand reports that the department has ordered factories to increase the number of times surfaces are disinfected and to disinfect containers prior to loading products. Seafood processing plants have been instructed to adhere rigidly to standards laid out in Good Manufacturing Practice and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point protocols.

Factory workers must undergo regular health screening and be made aware of disease prevention measures. Meanwhile, Vicharn says Thai fish and seafood can be eaten without any risk of Covid-19 transmission, insisting there is no evidence the virus can be passed from marine creatures. He says worried consumers should only purchase products prepared to certified standards, and should clean fish and seafood prior to consumption and use utensils for eating.

Mekong Migration Network statement on the Outbreak of COVID-19 among Migrant Workers in Samut Sakhon

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=18630>

"The recent spike in coronavirus (Covid-19) infections recorded in and around Samut Sakhon is alarming to the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) on multiple levels. We are particularly concerned about the potential negative impact of Prime Minister, Prayut Chan-o-chas remark that this latest flare up is primarily due to illegal immigrants who have brought much grief to the country. This follows the earlier comment by the Minister of Public Health, Anutin Charnvirakul that the source is likely migrant workers.

Rather than seeking a scapegoat, the current outbreak, centred on Samut Sakhons Central Shrimp Market, brings into sharp focus the disproportionate impact that the pandemic is having on the livelihood and health of Thailand's much maligned migrant workers. The seafood industry in Samut Sakhon, like elsewhere in Thailand, is hugely dependent on the low paid labour of migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia who live and work in conditions where physical distancing and recommended hygiene measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 are largely absent. In recent research conducted by MMN member, The Raks Thai Foundation, which included respondents from Samut Sakhons seafood industry, migrants reported that very few

employers imposed social distancing rules, provided PPE, checked temperatures before work, or used a rota system to limit the number of staff in the workplace at any one time.

The current outbreak is a product of the heightened risks faced by migrants due to their precarious working conditions and marginalisation from wider Thai society. MMN takes the view that Covid-19 preventative measures will only be successful if all of Thailand's diverse migrant communities are engaged in the response, and are treated fairly without discrimination. It is counterproductive to point the finger at migrants or scapegoat them as the source of the outbreak, since the current public health emergency requires collective action that is only possible when no one is left behind.

Migrants are also fearful of being locked down or quarantined in cramped, overcrowded conditions. It should be noted that many of the current difficulties containing the outbreak within the migrant community are rooted in a lack of coherence in policies that impact the lives of migrants.

Although many Thai policies in the field of social protection are relatively progressive in their treatment of migrants, implementation is often hamstrung by restrictive immigration policies that treat migrants as temporary workers.

This in the face of the reality that a great many migrant workers have lived for years, if not decades, in Thailand and consider it their permanent home. To tackle the current outbreak in Samut Sakhon, public health must be prioritised, and migrants must be assured that test, trace, and treatment for Covid-19 will be carried out at arms length from the immigration authorities.

Without a firewall between immigration enforcement and the Covid-19 response, migrants will be fearful of any contact with the authorities. Such an outcome will have serious implications for the Ministry of Public Health's ability to control the outbreak. We commend the words of Samut Sakhon Vice Governor Surasak Phonyangsong in remarking that Myanmar migrant workers are also human beings who deserve to be treated with humanity regardless of their immigration status.

Recommendations: In light of the above challenges, MMN calls on the relevant authorities to implement the following recommendations as a matter of urgency: 1. For the Ministry of Health to publicly announce and put in place measures to ensure that all migrants in Thailand, regardless of their immigration status, can access free public healthcare in relation to the diagnosis and treatment of Covid-19. 2. For the relevant Thai authorities to publicly announce that a person's immigration status will not be checked when they approach healthcare service providers for a test or treatment for Covid-19 and that all personal data will be treated in the strictest of confidence with an undertaking that immigration enforcement action will not be pursued against those who come forward. 3. For the Ministry of Public Health to ensure that all migrants in Thailand are accommodated, free of charge, in appropriate quarantine facilities where such action is deemed necessary. 4. For the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of

Public Health to urgently work towards a cohesive social protection package that catches all migrants, regardless of their immigration status, before they fall into destitution as a result of the health and economic impact of the pandemic.

5. For the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour to pass special measures to facilitate the extension of visas and work permits, and provide amnesty to those who have fallen out of the system. 6. For the Ministry of Labour to strictly enforce Covid-19 safety measures in all workplaces, and that employers provide their employees with protective equipment such as masks and alco gels for free. 7. For the Ministry of Labour to ensure that all employees, including migrant workers, receive paid sick leave during any quarantine and/or treatment period. 8. For the relevant authorities in Thailand and countries of origin to work together towards a public health and humanitarian response for border crossers, with efforts geared towards encouraging regular migration channels by providing affordable quarantine and health check measures at border entry points.

9. For the relevant authorities in Thailand and countries of origin to mount a far-reaching coordinated public information campaign aimed at migrants to inform them of important matters relating to the Covid-19 pandemic in appropriate migrant languages. Such information must include: preventative measures to stop the spread of Covid-19; what to do and how to contact the health authorities in the event of falling ill; immigration updates, including information on border closures; how to social distance and self-isolate; quarantine requirements; and relief measures available for migrants in case of sudden loss of income. 10. For the relevant authorities in Thailand and countries of origin to provide accurate information about the pandemic to the general public, and take a clear stance against any stigmatisation and discrimination against migrant communities.

For all the above, MMN urges the governments of countries of origin to actively reach out to their nationals, and closely coordinate with the relevant Thai authorities as well as NGOs to ensure that timely support is provided to all those who are in urgent need. Moreover, we reiterate our repeated calls for the Association of South East Asian Nations, ASEAN, to work in unity and provide a coordinate response regarding the movement of people in ways that will reduce the potential of virus spreading events while maintaining the dignity and rights of migrants. We emphasize once again the urgent need for portability of social protection in the region.

ABOUT THE MEKONG MIGRATION NETWORK

Founded in 2003, the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) is a sub-regional network of civil society organisations and research institutes working towards the protection and promotion of the rights of migrants and their families in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. MMNs areas of joint action include collaborative research, advocacy, capacity building and networking. MMN members operate in both countries of origin and destination, have unique expertise in the field,

and are in close contact with migrant workers at a grassroots level. For more information on MMN, please visit MMNs webpage at: www.mekongmigration.org

Study in Thailand identifies benefits of community-based freshwater fish reserves

<https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/news/2020/freshwater-fish-reserves>

"Aaron Koning, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Nevada, Reno's Global Water Center, has spent seven years studying a network of freshwater protected areas (fish reserves) that communities established in one branch of the Salween River Basin in northern Thailand. Working with the communities that rely on the river, he established friendships and trust and gained important insights that helped in his work to study how freshwater reserves help both the fish in the river and the people whose daily lives revolve around the Ngao River – the river of shadows.

In his most recently published research of this reserve network in Thailand, he found that the freshwater fish reserves are extraordinarily successful at protecting multiple species of fish. He mapped more than 50 reserves, all community organized and managed independently of government support, throughout the river and its branches.

The area supports more than 40 species of fish, ranging from large minnows to catfish to needlefish. The results were published Nov. 25 in the scientific journal *Nature* in the article “A network of grassroots reserves protects tropical river fish diversity.”

The conservation benefits of each reserve established independently by local Paganayaw, or Karen, indigenous communities are remarkable, and the collective benefits for fish within the entire network of reserves are even greater, Koning said. “Twenty-seven years ago, one community created a reserve in an effort to protect their fish, and since then reserves have spread among communities throughout the valley. It's a great story of effective community-based resource management.

Koning worked with a team of scientists who he had known from his work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: Martin Perales from the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Etienne Fluet-Chouinard, now from Stanford University, and aquatic conservation ecologist and Associate Professor Peter McIntyre of Cornell University.“

During the six weeks of fieldwork related to this study, Martin and I lived with friends in riverside villages, but made the 90-minute drive to Mae Sarieng for internet access on a couple of weekends, The families we stayed with have been like my extended host family for the past seven years, with friends and relatives spread throughout the river valley. They bounced around the study area of the 50-mile-long Ngao River in a 1999 Toyota Hilux 4X4 truck, through the

various communities, including teak forests and upland agricultural areas with rice paddies and soybean crops.“

When I initially started documenting the locations of reserves several years ago, I tried to find the locations of as many reserves within the basin as I could by exploring every road and trail on the map, and many that weren't on any map, he said. “For our fish surveys, we selected a set of 23 reserves distributed throughout the river basin that broadly represented all of the reserves. While there are probably 40 species within this river valley, in this study we regularly observed 33 species of fish.

His fish surveys were conducted during the dry season, when little or no rain falls from November to May. In the wet season, the river increases in height by more than 12 feet, everything is lush and damp and the teak and dipterocarp trees dominate much of the landscape along with as well as upland agricultural areas, rice paddies, and soybeans being grown.

Intensive fisheries have reduced fish biodiversity and abundance in aquatic ecosystems worldwide. No-take reserves have become a cornerstone of marine ecosystem-based fisheries management. The team used the knowledge gained from decades of study on marine reserves to test if the same principles of success might apply to this network of riverine reserves, where one might not think reserves would work.“

The applicability of this marine reserve network paradigm to riverine biodiversity and inland fisheries remains largely untested, Koning said. “Our research shows that freshwater reserves created by 23 separate communities in Thailand's Salween basin have dramatically increased fish richness, density and biomass when compared to adjacent areas. One river reserve is 1,000 feet long and just 12 feet wide in dry season, but you can see fish everywhere.

Underwater fish surveys were done using masks and snorkels with lots of crawling over and around rocks underwater. In many reserves, the abundance and size of fish seeking protection was evident by eye from the river bank in the dry season. McIntyre, now Koning's colleague in this research, was once his doctoral advisor at the University of Wisconsin, and co-advisor for his postdoctoral work at Cornell.

McIntyre said he was shocked that the reserves worked so well. “When you see piles of fish in each of these reserves, it is clear that something big is happening, he said. “Questions remain about whether the fish populations are viable in the long run, and how durable the governance approach will prove, but this unique experiment in conservation still has much to teach us.

Community conservation reserves protect fish diversity in tropical rivers: study

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/11/201125135134.htm>

"Prohibiting fishing in conservation reserves is a common strategy for protecting ocean ecosystems and enhancing fisheries management. However, such dedicated reserves are rare in freshwater ecosystems, where conservation efforts generally piggyback on the protection of terrestrial habitats and species.

Now, a collaboration between researchers from Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison has found that small, community-based reserves in Thailand's Salween River Basin are serving as critical refuges for fish diversity in a region whose subsistence fisheries have suffered from decades of overharvesting. The team's paper, "'A Network of Grassroots Reserves Protects Tropical River Fish Diversity,'" published Nov. 25 in Nature.

The lead author is Aaron Koning, a former postdoctoral fellow with the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability who is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Nevada, Reno. The project was overseen by Pete McIntyre, the Dwight Webster Sesquicentennial Faculty Fellow and associate professor of natural resources and environment at Cornell University.

Freshwater ecosystems across the world have experienced rapid species declines compared to ecosystems on land or in the ocean. One of the leading causes is overfishing, particularly in regions where fish are a vital source of human nutrition.

Koning launched his work in Thailand as a doctoral student with McIntyre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with the goal of testing whether the benefits documented from marine conservation reserves might also apply to freshwater systems.

Both researchers came to Cornell in 2018 and continued to work on the project with their collaborators at UW-Madison. They focused on the Mae Ngao River along Thailand's border with Myanmar, because Southeast Asia has an unusually long history of freshwater conservation reserves.

In 2012, Koning began documenting more than 50 reserves spread over 1,000 square kilometers of the river valley. Each of these reserves had been created by a local community to support its own nearby fishing grounds. "'It was really striking to see this largely uncoordinated effort of grassroots actors who pursued this fascinating conservation strategy of their own volition, and they keep doing it because they can see the benefits in their catches,'" Koning said. "

"That really motivated me to ask the questions: Why does this work and could it work elsewhere?'" The researchers surveyed fish communities in 23 separate reserves that ranged in length from 300 meters to 2 kilometers. Compared to adjacent areas where fishing is unrestricted and intense, the grassroots reserves contained on average 27% more fish species and 124% higher fish density, with a more than twentyfold increase in overall biomass. "

"Generally, we think of rivers as systems where things flow through and fish move around constantly, so what effect could a small reserve possibly have?'" Koning said. "'But just having

a few hundred meters where people aren't fishing, while they're fishing like crazy everywhere else, can consistently produce these big changes."

"One of the key characteristics for successful reserves was location. When reserves are placed within view of local villages, the community members can enforce conservation rules and deter poachers. ""Residents can literally see the large fish from their homes -- it's pretty compelling,"" McIntyre said. Fish longer than 20 centimeters (approximately 8 inches) were almost entirely restricted to the reserves, and larger reserves saw the biggest bump in fish diversity and size.

Community members reported that having the reserves over time helped them to catch larger fish. This indicates the reserves not only protect biodiversity but can also bolster the food security of local populations, especially during the dry season when farmers have collected their crops and turn to subsistence fishing to supplement their families' diets. ""As if the local benefits were not amazing enough, we were fascinated to see a further benefit of having other reserves nearby.

These fish populations appear to be linked, yielding synergistic gains when the ad hoc network of reserves allows exchange among protected areas,"" McIntyre said. The team's findings aligned with the theoretical predictions made by marine conservation models, which led the researchers to suspect the grassroots reserves could be a successful strategy for other regions that have been overharvested, such as in the Mekong, Amazon and Congo rivers, where intensive fisheries feed millions of people. "

"This is a great example of communities engaging in conservation on their own, and being successful,"" Koning said. ""If we can take that reality, mix it with what we already know from marine systems, then maybe we can marry these things and design a system of small reserves that maximize conservation benefits while improving fishery benefits for communities, too.""

Koning is now working with Zeb Hogan, an aquatic ecologist at the University of Nevada-Reno who hosts the National Geographic network program ""Monster Fish,"" to study this conservation approach at larger scales in the Mekong River basin. The research was supported by the National Science Foundation, the Mustard Seed Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, in addition to the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability.

Pandemic respite for Thai sea gypsies curbed by mass tourism

<https://www.deccanherald.com/international/world-news-politics/pandemic-respite-for-thai-sea-gypsies-curbed-by-mass-tourism-918906.html>

"Coronavirus has wrought havoc across the world, but for Thailand's ""sea gypsies"" it has brought welcome respite from the threat of mass tourism. Since the pandemic began, life has

been easier for Sanan Changnam and his people -- there's an abundance of fish to eat and real estate projects on their ancestral land in the tourist hotspot of Phuket have come to a standstill.

In the turquoise waters of the Andaman Sea, connected to the surface by a slender pipe stuck in his mask -- a ""thread of life"" allowing him to breathe -- Sanan stalks fish and shellfish, spear in hand. A few kicks of his flippers and he skewers three groupers before rising to the surface.

With Thailand closed to foreign visitors for the past eight months, tourist boats have been stuck at the quay and fishing has been easier for the Chao Lay, or ""people of the sea"". ""We don't dive as deep as before, so it's less dangerous,"" Sanan, 42, tells AFP.

His ancestors, former nomads who came from Indonesia nearly 300 years ago, took a spit of land in Rawai, a beach in the south of Phuket, long before the island became one of the country's most popular destinations.

More than nine million visitors came to Phuket in 2019 and the boom has had a huge impact, bringing declining fish stocks, shrinking fishing grounds and a frenzy of construction. The traditional way of life of the Chao Lay, also known as ""sea gypsies"", has been turned upside down -- but the pandemic has brought a pause.

Landless Thais get homes in mangrove forest in conservation push

<https://in.reuters.com/article/thailand-landrights-community/landless-thais-get-homes-in-mangrove-forest-in-conservation-push-idINL8N2HZ27A>

"Thai authorities have reached an agreement with a landless community that will allow villagers to live in a mangrove forest if they help protect the area, a unique collaboration that could work across the country, land rights groups said.

Under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the government, human rights groups and about 45 families in the coastal town of Ranong, the community will not get ownership rights but will receive assistance in building homes and access to utilities.

The agreement, which was struck earlier this month and includes indigenous people such as the sea gypsies, is now being replicated in the coastal cities of Phuket and Krabi. "The communities have been fighting for land for a long time, and we had been trying to find a solution through numerous negotiations, said Maitree Jongkrajug, a manager at Chumchon Thai Foundation, a nonprofit that is a part of the MOU. "This is a pilot project, the first of its kind - a model of cooperation between communities, civic organisations and the government that can work for landless people in protected areas, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Monday.

About a third of Thailand's 69 million people depends on land for a living, but nearly 80% of private land is formally owned by less than a fifth of the population, according to land rights groups who have long called for reforms.

Coastal communities are particularly vulnerable as a tourism boom has pitted them against developers keen on land that their boats, homes and shrines sit on, while the government's conservation efforts limits their access to the sea for fishing.

Varawut Silpa-archa, Thailand's minister of natural resources and environment, had committed to resolving land conflicts and landlessness when he took office last year. "It is a priority of the government to give land for those who need it for housing and farming, he said. "But the government must also strike a balance between land use and conservation of the environment.

Mangroves protect coastlines against storms, rising seas and tsunamis. They also absorb planet-heating carbon from the atmosphere, and provide nurseries for young fish, which supports the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Earlier this year, a community in northern Thailand won a United Nations prize for their efforts in conserving a wetland forest, and halting efforts to turn it into an industrial zone. In Ranong, Phuket and Krabi, villagers will follow the conditions laid out by authorities for the conservation of the protected areas, Maitree said.

Months-long anti-government protests probably increased pressure on Thai authorities to address the long-standing issue of landlessness, he said. "This is about giving people justice, reducing inequality - which is among the demands of protesters also, he said. "The government is paying more attention to this issue.

Working group of nations go after Chinas flags of convenience

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/working-group-of-nations-go-after-china-s-flags-of-convenience>

"Fisheries officials from the European Union, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States have met to discuss cooperation on limiting the use of flags of convenience by distant-water fishery companies involved in illegal fishing.

The online meeting, which took place 15 October, follows a report by the advocacy group Environmental Justice Foundation criticizing the process whereby fishing companies buy flags from flag states, which are then unwilling or unable to monitor the activity of problem trawlers.

The report, "Off the Hook: How Flags of Convenience Let Illegal Fishing Go Unpunished, details the damage that flags of convenience cause to fisheries and how they are used to conduct

illegal fishing. In the report, EJF calls for sanctions to end the practice and more transparency surrounding the registration of fishing vessels.

“Flags of convenience in fisheries confound accountability, the EJF report states. Flags of convenience and the frequent practice of re-flagging used by vessel owners to escape sanctions also “hinder efforts to identify and sanction the ultimate beneficiaries of illegal fishing activities, according to the report.

An earlier EJF report on the same issue, published nearly a decade ago, named the E.U. and fishing countries in East Asia as the key users of flags of convenience. South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, whose fleets were all the subject of earlier attention from EJF for partaking in flags of convenience, are all now part of the new working group. The group appears to be focused on China, which is not part of the group.

China has received a global reputation for operation through ownership of local companies in poor fishing countries and for the frequent use of flags of convenience by its vast distant-water fleet. Chinese vessels fishing in Ghana under the colors of Liberia, a popular source for flags of convenience, have been a recent focus of attention for EJF.

Aside from flags of convenience, fishing companies dodge scrutiny by registering in jurisdictions with “corporate laws that are permissive, or laxly enforced, according to the EJF report. That enables the local registration of fishery companies that are actually under foreign ownership.

The move against flags of convenience may draw support from policymakers from the countries in the working group, given their movement in recent years against global money laundering and tax evasion. Several have introduced beneficial ownership registries delineating the true ownership of assets often held through shelf companies in offshore jurisdictions, where disclosure rules are lax. Britain and the E.U., for instance, have launched a publicly available corporate registry requiring disclosure of beneficial ownership.

Both are moving to require similar registering of their overseas territories, like the British Virgin Islands, whose corporate registry is favored by Chinese companies seeking to hold assets offshore. The EJF is calling for similar transparency brought to bear on flags of convenience, which “conceal the identities of the true beneficial owners, precluding identification and sanctions where their vessels engage in illicit activities. “These same, secretive corporate structures frustrate the investigations of tax authorities and other non-fisheries government agencies, the group said in the report.

The EJF report is the latest to investigate the exploitation of Africa's fishery resources by large industrial trawlers from several major fishing nations, including China. The issue of flags of convenience has become central to ongoing talks on ending harmful fishery subsidies at the

World Trade Organization, and negotiators seek to seal off work-arounds like fleets registered overseas.

Fishery representatives in West Africa are watching closely. Artisanal fishermen, women processors face threats from industrial trawlers that weigh on fishery resources, marine biodiversity, and domestic fishermen, according to Alassane Dieng, head of Groupement des Armateurs et Industriels de la Pêche au Sénégal (GAIPES), which represents local fishing interests.

“We are against any form of so-called subsidies which have a negative impact on fish stocks, on the fishing industry of developing countries and on the populations of artisanal fishermen and women processors of fishery products, he told SeafoodSource. “Unfortunately, however, these are practices that are the prerogative of distant fishing countries, which allow their vessels to be efficient and hyper-profitable to sail the seas and compete unfairly with local artisanal and industrial fishermen, in particular in West Africa.

Flooding in South-East Asia leaves at least 20 dead, thousands homeless

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-12/flooding-vietnam-cambodia-at-least-20-dead-typhoon-linfa/12757392>

"More than two dozen people have been killed by flooding in South-East Asia with more missing and thousands of homes inundated as tropical storms sweep the region. At least 17 people have been reported dead in Vietnam's central provinces in the past week, 13 are still missing and more than 30,000 have been left homeless.

On Monday morning, the military had mobilised more than 200,000 soldiers to help residents in the worst affected areas in preparation for Typhoon Linfa which made landfall south of Da Nang. Across the border in Cambodia, flooding has killed at least 11 people since the beginning of the month.

Seasonal rains had been exacerbated by a tropical storm, which caused flash floods in several provinces last week, said Khun Sokha, a spokesman for the National Committee for Disaster Management.

Ten people reportedly drowned in floodwaters and one was killed by lightning, he said. Several hundred families had been evacuated to higher ground.

On Friday, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered local authorities to mobilise assistance to those affected. Thailand and Laos have also endured flooding. Footage broadcast by Vietnam TV showed fishermen being rescued by coastguard and helicopters as strong winds battered the central Vietnamese coast in the central province of Quang Tri.

Floods have cut food supplies to thousands of people, around 31,000 people have been displaced and more than 33,000 houses submerged and damaged by floods, according to a Government report.

Vietnam is prone to destructive storms and flooding due to its long coastline. Natural disasters predominantly floods and landslides triggered by storms killed 132 people and injured 207 others in the country last year.

Thai migrant school closures fuel child labor in seafood industry

<https://in.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-workers-education/migrant-school-closures-fuel-child-labour-in-thai-seafood-industry-idUSKBN26S03M>

"Chit Su has been stuck at home peeling crabs with her grandmother since her school for Burmese migrants closed last year in southern Thailand. Even working together, they make less than a daily minimum wage. Ten such schools in Ranong province shut after an August 2019 raid by Thai officials that targeted Burmese teachers without proper work permits, and advocates say the closures have driven many former pupils into illegal seafood industry jobs."

This is hard work... if I study I'll get to do a job that's less tough, said Chit Su, 15, whose name has been changed to protect her identity. "But now, if I don't help my grandma, we won't have any money. She and her grandmother earn 240 baht (\$7.60) a day - less than the 315-baht minimum in Ranong, and a drop in the ocean as they try to clear the family's 8,000-baht debt. Chit Su is among some 2,800 Burmese children who have been affected by the raid on her migrant learning centre, Ranongtarni, which led to the arrest of more than 30 Burmese teachers and forced the school to close.

Nine other educational centres funded by charities and private donors in Ranong halted classes soon afterwards, fearing they could also be raided. One has since reopened. The Education Ministry said it was tracking down former pupils who are still not attending classes in order to enrol them in public schools, non-formal education programmes and community learning centres. Like Chit Su, many of the former students now work at private fish markets or at home shelling crabs for a multi-billion dollar industry that has faced global scrutiny in recent years over the abuse of Thai and migrant workers. The Thomson Reuters Foundation interviewed 11 child workers in Ranong who were working in the industry without permits.

Children's rights campaigners said the school closures had drawn many migrant schoolchildren into illegal, low-paid work just as the COVID-19 pandemic raises the risk of child labour. "The consequences (of the closures) were much more severe (than the officials) predicted – it resulted in child labour in the fishing industry, said Adisorn Kerdmongkol, coordinator at the Migrant Working Group, a network of NGOs helping migrants. "This is worrying... and made worse with COVID-19, he added. Millions of children worldwide could be pushed into work as schools

remain shut and families struggle to survive the economic fallout of COVID-19, the United Nations has warned.

In Thailand, the pandemic has led to a shift from seafood processing at factories or peeling sheds towards home-based work often done by migrants, according to activists. In one mainly Burmese neighbourhood in Ranong's Muang district, children as young as 10 used sharp tools to help their families shell crabs brought each day by seafood suppliers.

Besides a ban on under 18s undertaking hazardous work, children aged below 15 are banned from all labour in Thailand. The Thai Labour Ministry does not specifically list seafood processing as hazardous work but children's rights campaigners said it falls into the category. Two labour lawyers said it depends on what exactly the job involves. But despite the country's laws, 177,000 children aged five to 17 work as labourers in Thailand - three quarters in hazardous jobs, a 2018 survey by the government and the United Nations showed.

Still, the head of one of the main bodies representing Thai seafood producers said the industry was more concerned about forced labour than child labour. "That Burmese children are out of school and are working is a way for them to survive, said Panisuan Jamnarnwej, honorary president of the Thai Frozen Foods Association. The Department of Labour Protection and Welfare declined to comment, while Ranong's provincial administration did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

It is not clear how many migrant learning centres operate because most are not registered, the Education Ministry said. They are not funded by the government and in most areas children are taught in their own language as opposed to Thai. Since the closure of the centres in Ranong, some of the children have already enrolled in Thai public schools, while others are studying in non-formal education systems such as learning in migrant camps, according to Save the Children.

But the charity estimated that up to 500 of them have dropped out of education altogether. Across Thailand, migrant children often drop out of school between 10 and 12, mostly due to financial constraints, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). "Migrant children constitute the largest group of children out of school in Thailand, said Maria Moita, IOM's acting chief of mission to Thailand, putting the number at about 200,000. Of the 10 learning centres that closed, only one managed by the Marist Asia Foundation has reopened after getting work permits for Burmese teachers and adding a Thai curriculum.

"The government is not doing anything to help these children. It's like we're abandoning them, said Prasit Rugklin, the charity's secretary. At the Education Ministry, however, a senior official said authorities "will not abandon these children. "I have informed the minister and permanent secretary about the needs of (these children), and they are very concerned, said Wira Khaengkasikarn, the ministry's deputy permanent secretary.

Var Say Hta, a Burmese monk who manages Ranonghtarni - which had more than 1,100 students before the raid - said at least 150 former students aged 15 or over are now working. Another of the school's former students - 17-year-old Soe Win - works 12 hours a day at a private fish market now.

He earns 300 baht per day, gets two days off a month and spends his hours packing ice into boxes of fish and loading them onto trucks. School would be better, he said. "The problem is, only my mum is working because my dad's paralysed, said Soe Win, whose name has been changed to protect his identity. "I want to study because it's more fun at school.

Fishing operators demand Thai govt. buy their boats

<https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/fishing-operators-demand-thai-government-to-buy-their-boats-313351>

"Over 2,000 commercial fishing operators in Thailand are selling their fishing vessels to the government after they have been affected by a myriad of regulations imposed to solve illegal, unreported and unregulated [IUU] fishing.

Fishing boat owners such as those in the southern province of Songkhla province have demanded the government to buy their fishing vessels. Pinyo Pinijsathira, a Songkhla fisherman, said he had stopped fishing for three years because of tough fishing regulations and now decided to quit his 30-year career. There are reportedly some 2,505 vessels claimed to have been affected by the anti-IUU policies.

The government has, meanwhile, pledged to buy hundreds of trawlers from companies and to relax several fishing regulations, according to a government spokesperson.

The current administration has introduced several fishing regulations since the European Union gave Thailand a "yellow card status over IUU fishing issues in 2015. Claiming the rules have hurt the fishing industry, the National Fisheries Association of Thailand (NFAT) has threatened to stage a mass protest in Bangkok to pressure the government to ease the regulations.

Thailand continues helping fishing sector and open to suggestions

<https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/thailand-continues-helping-fishing-sector-and-open-to-suggestions-313208>

"Since the National Fisheries Association of Thailand asked the government to help address challenges faced by workers in the fishing sector due to measures against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the government says that it is ready to consider their demands and find solutions to their problems.

The Deputy Government Spokeswoman, Dr. Ratchada Thanadirek, said today the government is aware of their plight and has already taken action in many areas, such as making some changes to the rules and regulations, purchasing trawlers from affected owners and improving their liquidity.

The National Fisheries Policy Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan, is overseeing the tasks of related ministries and sending progress reports to Prime Minister and Defense Minister, Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha.

The issue has been declared part of the national agenda, and relevant agencies must work cautiously so that Thailand is not given a yellow-card sanction by the European Union (EU). At the same time, they have to acknowledge the workers' demands.

The Department of Fisheries has adjusted the rules and regulations to help the fishing sector in many respects, including making changes to the list of fishing gear and fishing zones as well as the issuance of seamen's registration books to deal with labor shortages.

The government is now improving its vessel monitoring system (VMS) to facilitate the fishing sector. The government is also looking into amending laws related to local and commercial fishing activities, but it must proceed cautiously. Unregistered trawler procurement is divided into two groups.

The first group comprises 568 trawlers that have been adversely affected by changes in the fishing laws. The government has already allocated funds for the purchase of 252 trawlers, and will purchase 53 additional trawlers this October. The total acquisition budget is 764 million baht. Officials are also inspecting the criteria of 263 trawlers.

The second group consists of 2,505 trawlers, which previously received a license which their owners now want to cancel. Officials are considering these trawlers' criteria and working conditions.

In addition, the government has approved a low-interest loan project, worth 10.3 billion baht in total, to improve the liquidity of entrepreneurs in the fishing sector. The loans would help them install new equipment and employ workers legally. If local and commercial fishing operators see that their issues remain unresolved and think no progress is being made, the Prime Minister is ready to listen to their suggestions to help solve their problems.

Thailand govt. mulls buying back more trawlers, ease rules

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1977099/govt-mulls-buying-back-more-trawlers-ease-rules>

"The government of Thailand has agreed to help commercial fishing operations by pledging to consider buying back more trawlers from companies affected by the regulations and relaxing several fishing regulations."

"The government has been working hard to find ways to respond to the demands of those affected by the government's fishing regulations, which were aimed at solving illegal, unreported and unregulated [IUU] fishing in Thailand," said deputy government spokeswoman Rachada Dhnadirek on Sunday after the National Fisheries Association of Thailand (NFAT) threatened to stage a mass protest in Bangkok.

She said the prime minister has made the fishing industry a national priority and ordered state bodies to listen to local fishermen and associations like NFAT to fine-tune its policies. The government introduced a raft of tough fishing rules to convince the European Union -- a major importer of Thai seafood products -- to withdraw Thailand's yellow card status over IUU fishing issues. The EU finally did so in January last year, but the NFAT -- the country's largest trawler-operators organisation -- claims the rules have caused the fishing industry to suffer.

The association is pushing the government to relax several rules, including a requirement for trawlers to have a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) installed, which allows authorities to monitor their real-time movements.

It is also demanding the government to buy back some 2,505 vessels which it claimed to have been affected by the the government's anti-IUU policies. Ms Rachada said the government is working on revising some rules, before adding the government has already approved 764.45 million baht to buy back 305 vessels and would seek more budget to buy back 263 more boats.

The deputy spokeswoman said the government will provide low-interest loans worth 10.3 billion baht to encourage fishermen to improve their equipment to meet international regulations.

4 Thai eco-warriors on Natures comeback during COVID

<https://www.thailandtatler.com/society/on-the-comeback-trail>

"Four eco-warriors in the vanguard of environmental protection in Thailand talk to Tatler Thailand about the impact of the coronavirus lockdown on the nation's wildlife and its tourism industry and the chance it affords us to implement permanent changes for the good of both. irachai Arunrugstichai is a marine biologist turned photojournalist who specialises in marine conservation stories.

He laughs, "So, I have a very large and salty office. I roam around different oceans, hop between islands and travel diverse coastlines. My goal is to be at the right place at the right time to capture images that educate, that tell the stories of the seas. Shin, as he is known, mainly

photographs for the local edition of National Geographic and agencies related to conservation. He also undertakes freelance assignments from international eco-organisations.

A busy man, he has witnessed first hand the damaging impact mankind has had on the world's oceans. "Overfishing is what concerns me most, he says. "Over many years of collecting data in fish markets and diving the deep, the effects of overfishing have become very obvious to me. Some species have almost disappeared completely and the impact on large marine predators, particularly sharks, has become acute. Whereas the outbreak of Covid-19 has given nature a foothold for recovery in many areas, Shin says that from personal observations it doesn't appear to have had much effect far out at sea.

"Sure there has been a smaller human footprint in coastal regions, which is good and has given rise to numerous reports of notable animal sightings—sea turtles nesting in new spots, huge herds of dugongs, the return of certain species to previously abandoned territories, even the recovery of fish stocks in inland waters, he explains.

"But the reported recovery of fish stocks cannot be completely attributed to Covid-19. Prior to the outbreak, the adjustment of fisheries rules to combat IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing were beginning to have an impact. The slow-down caused by Covid-19 will help but in the long run we have to change our fishing practices to make an enduring difference. Change in the way we approach issues involving nature is key for Shin, who believes there are two key components to this.

"The first is behavioural change. The focus in mainstream conversation is on changing our individual behaviour to reduce a harmful footprint, he says citing waste generation, energy consumption and the adoption of environmentally responsible products as examples.

"The other crucial component is policymaking and implementation. We need lawmakers to embrace and promote strong policies that balance economic needs with a systematic, long-term commitment to conservation. The shifting of Thailand's fisheries towards more sustainable practices is a starting point, Shin adds.

"Instead of trawling in whatever they can regardless of size and species, which is severely destructive to the marine environment and very wasteful, policymakers could provide more incentives to shift our nation's fisheries away from that mindset subsidise them not to fish in a certain way if you like and get them to switch to eco-friendly line methods and abandon nets. That would allow for the long-term recovery of marine resources.

Thailand's COVID-19 response an example of resilience and solidarity: a UN Resident Coordinators blog

https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1069191?utm_source=UN+News+-+Newsletter&utm_campaign=d3f1a33dc8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_08_05_12_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fdbf1af606-d3f1a33dc8-107475426

"In January, Thailand became the second country to confirm a COVID-19 case but, since then, the country has shown remarkable resilience and, as of late July, there had not been any recorded cases of domestic transmission for nearly two months. Gita Sabharwal, the UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand, explains that this success is thanks to a combination of government action, social responsibility and community solidarity.

Thailand's overall response, and ability to curb infections, has led the World Health Organization (WHO) to identify Thailand, alongside New Zealand, as a success story in dealing with the pandemic. Of course, that success entirely depends on continued vigilance, a whole-of-society approach, and ramped up testing to prevent a second wave as borders open and full economic activities are resumed.

The economic impact of the pandemic has been serious, with predictions of an 8.1 per cent contraction of the economy in 2020. According to a recent survey, 65 per cent of people in Thailand report that their incomes are totally or very inadequate under pandemic conditions, with almost the same percentage saying that their finances had been adversely affected.

Having started in my position just one week before the lockdown, my view of Thailand has been very COVID-centric. We have all personally felt the effects of the pandemic in many different ways and a large number of UN staff in Thailand have been apart from their families for months due to travel restrictions – my own family reunification was postponed for the first half of the year, and I hope to see my husband next month for the first time since the outbreak. At the same time, we are profoundly aware that vulnerable communities are bearing the brunt of this crisis, making our advocacy and work with partners all the more important.

As the Resident Coordinator, my focus has been on working closely with the UN Country Team to develop the UN's comprehensive response strategy to the pandemic and positioning it to be cutting edge, forward leaning, and offering thought leadership to sustain development gains and build back better. Our understanding of the impact of the crisis and its implications on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continues to unfold as we speak. It is only now that we are more fully understanding the implications of COVID-19 on agriculture and farm households, and the more long-term social impact.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres set the tone for UN's approach with his Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity plan to counter the severe socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, while emphasising the imperative for a comprehensive whole-of-society and whole-of-government response. The Royal Thai Government's contribution to the UN's COVID-19 Fund speaks to this shared responsibility. Similarly, the role played by the 1 million health volunteers,

two-thirds of whom are women, in contact tracing across the country speaks to the whole of society approach.

The government's stimulus packages have been comprehensive, rapid and well-sequenced, constituting 15 per cent of GDP. Almost half of respondents to a recent survey reported having received government support. Modelling estimates suggest that while government expenditure is emerging as the most effective means to support growth and employment, cash handouts followed by soft loans are the next best measures. In partnership with the National Economic and Social Development Council, the national economic planning agency of Thailand, UN Thailand will monitor the impact of these fiscal stimulus packages targeted at local economies to inform government programming.

The government will also need to closely watch the impact at the household level in the third and fourth quarters, and further refine the mix of stimulus measures with sharper targeting. In terms of vulnerabilities, the impact assessment indicates that youth could potentially lose out the most given rising unemployment and with nearly half a million young people joining the labour force at a time when jobs are difficult to secure. Similarly, women and men are impacted equally, yet differently, which will serve as a drag to the recovery process.

UN Thailand's strategy focuses on investing in partnerships with a clear-eyed view to build back better, while keeping the SDGs on track. The plan combines the direct health response based on the principle of leaving no one behind while investing in forward-looking policies to protect jobs and economies as well as to strengthen social capital.

Our immediate health response focuses on supporting the Government to strengthen surveillance and laboratory capacity, as well as to facilitate private and public sector engagement on vaccine research and pilot a “new normal health service through tele-medicine. It also ensures that vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees have access to PPE and health services.

In order to leave no one behind, UN Thailand has prioritised social protection, including successfully advocating for augmenting old age, child, and disability grants. In dialogue with the Royal Thai Government, we are supporting real-time monitoring of gender-based violence and violence against children while strengthening prevention and response.

The UN is also mapping digital infrastructure to understand geographies and communities that are underserved to bridge the digital divide and support e-learning platforms for schools.

In partnership with local communities, the UN is scaling up sustainable tourism models which protect biodiversity, linking supply chains with markets to strengthen the network of community food management, as well as working with small and medium enterprises to support green technology to jumpstart the local economy, and supporting dialogue with youth across the country to showcase innovations which have created jobs for the marginalised in response to the crisis.

All evidence suggests that the pandemic will impact the SDGs, but it doesn't have to, as long as there is effective reprioritisation, and public and private investments are strategically maximised. A resilient recovery will demand sustained economic support, long-term thinking, and policies which include a focus on building back better to jumpstart local economies and enable a green recovery.

Polling suggests that more than one-third of people in Thailand have donated cash, food or supplies during the pandemic, with most donations under 5,000 baht (about 160 US dollars). To me, this speaks of the social capital of the country and in many ways the glue that holds society together. There is also anecdotal evidence that in more marginalised regions, such as the northeast and deep south, the scale of donations has been higher.

We have seen in Thailand and around the world that times of crisis bring out the best of people. COVID-19 presents unprecedented challenges, but also opportunities to build back better. UN Thailand remains committed to working collaboratively to recover from the pandemic and to rebuild for a more equitable, just and resilient society.

Myanmar green lights commercial crocodile breeding for zoos, meat, leather

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-green-lights-commercial-crocodile-breeding-zoos-meat-leather.html>

"The Myanmar government says it will now allow commercial breeding of crocodiles, according to the Forest Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation. The ministry will allow breeding of saltwater crocodiles, mugger crocodiles and Siamese crocodiles for zoos, commercial displays and meat and leather production. The move is part of a plan to conserve endangered species under the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law.

The Forest Department said it will announce details later about requirements for crocodile farming. The decision presents an opportunity to turn Yangon's Thaketa Crocodile Farm, which was established in 1978 for crocodile conservation and tourism, into a commercial business, said U Myint Zin Htoo, deputy director-general of the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation. "It costs us a lot to feed the crocodiles, so it would be better to make a business out of them, he told The Irrawaddy.

He suggested that, depending on the changes in the policy, the Thaketa Crocodile Farm may partner with experienced private companies on a profit-sharing basis to breed crocodiles and produce meat and leather. According to the Fisheries Department, there are more than 500 crocodiles at Thaketa Crocodile Farm, ranging in length from 1 ft to over 10 ft (3.5 m).

In 1997, Myanmar signed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an agreement between governments to ensure that the trade of plants and animals does not threaten their species' survival.

Under the convention, crocodiles cannot be sold commercially until they have been bred in captivity for three generations, and a certain proportion of the crocodiles will have to be released into wild habitats to ensure the species' survival.

“Other countries also engage in this business. It is good if crocodiles can be bred for profit because they have to be fed anyway [at Thaketa Crocodile Farm], U Win Ko Ko, who worked as senior technical coordinator at the Wildlife Conservation Society, told The Irrawaddy.

However, he warned that allowing commercial production of crocodile meat and leather will also give rise to illegal killing of wild crocodiles. Myanmar's neighbor Thailand is home to some of the world's biggest crocodile farms, part of a booming industry for tourism and production of meat and leather.

Some 1.2 million crocodiles are kept on more than 1,000 farms in Thailand, according to figures from the Thai Department of Fisheries. Sri Ayutthaya Crocodile Farm is one of Thailand's biggest and has been operating for 35 years. It is registered with the CITES, allowing it to legally export products made from the critically-endangered Siamese freshwater crocodile. China is the biggest buyer of crocodile products, followed by Hong Kong, Taiwan and countries in the Middle East.

Under the socialist regime of military dictator General Ne Win, the People's Pearl and Fisheries Corporation starting exporting live crocodiles caught in the Ayeyarwady Delta in 1972. The overhunting put the reptile on the verge of extinction and the military regime stopped exports in 1994.

Meinmahla Kyun in Ayeyarwady Region's Bogale Township was then established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1994 to conserve crocodiles. It hosts Myanmar's largest wild crocodile population; according to a 2015 survey, there are more than 110 crocodiles in Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary.

IORAs new working group to support fisheries revival post-COVID-19

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/iora-s-new-working-group-to-support-fisheries-revival-post-covid-19>

"Four African countries are among nine Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) members that have formed a new working group to explore options for supporting the seafood industry, and the wider marine fisheries and aquaculture industry in and around the Indian Ocean as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll on the regional economy.

During a virtual meeting on 23 June of the IORA Cluster Group on Fisheries Management, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Tanzania joined Indonesia, Oman, Bangladesh, and Thailand in launching the working group to explore and recommend specific and viable initiatives for supporting the region's economic recovery during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, The Jakarta Post reported.

“We are facing COVID-19 as a common enemy. As an organization comprising countries in the Indian Ocean, the IORA must renavigate its focus toward marine cooperation, including in the fisheries sector, Indonesian Foreign Ministry Asia-Pacific and African Affairs Director General Desra Percaya said during the meeting, according to the Jakarta Post.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having set back years of progress on advancing the region's fisheries economy, the working group has been tasked with generating new proposals to support the sector, from small-scale fisherfolk to larger commercial enterprises, through and after the pandemic.

Furthermore, the working group is expected to provide a framework for the recovery and growth of Indian Ocean marine tourism, in addition to suggesting better ways of enhancing seafood trade among IORA members, and between members and the rest of world. The group, which will provide regular updates on its progress to members, is expected to build on the 2017 Jakarta Concord, in which IORA members resolved to promote maritime safety and security while enhancing trade and investment cooperation in the region.

Moreover, the IORA members pledged to promote sustainable and responsible fisheries management and development, enhance disaster risk management, and strengthen academic, scientific, and technological cooperation in the region – among other commitments.

The COVID-19 outbreak comes at a time when IORA members are still battling against persistent overfishing; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; marine pollution; and a tendency by both public private sectors to over-exploit the Indian Ocean's marine resources.

In the short- and medium-term, IORA is placing emphasis on proper post-harvest processing, promotion of storage and preservation facilities to enable fishing communities reduce losses, and building up adequate seafood stocks to meet increasing demand for a surging population of seafood consumers.

Net gains: Thai project turns fishing nets into virus protection gear

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/thailand-coronavirus-covid19-recycling-innovation-supplies-ocean>

"Thai fisherman Anan Jaitang used to pile tattered nylon fishing nets on the beach after hauls of wriggling crabs tore them beyond repair, but most of the nets wound up in the sea, threatening to

entangle turtles and choke coral reefs. Now, Anan and others have an alternative that's not only lucrative and environmentally friendly but will help Thailand battle the coronavirus pandemic.

A new community-based project is paying small-scale fishermen 10 baht (32 cents) per kilogram of discarded nets, or about every one or two, to recycle them into items from push sticks to face shields and disinfectant bottles. "

"If no one bought my fishing nets, they would just pile up like a mountain," says Anan, who goes through about 36 nets every quarter, fishing in the east coast province of Rayong. He is among more than 100 artisanal fishermen from four coastal villages in Thailand's east and south to have joined the project, run by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF).

With 50,000 small fishing vessels and 10,000 commercial ships, Thailand has one of the world's largest fishing industries, and is also one of its top marine plastic polluters.

Hundreds of endangered sea animals wash up on Thailand's shores every year. About 74% of sea turtles and 89% of dugongs stranded on the beaches between 2015 and 2017 had been injured by nets left or lost in oceans, official Thai figures show. About 640,000 tonnes of fishing nets end up in the ocean globally every year, becoming ""ghost gear,"" the United Nations says. In addition to tackling Thailand's stubborn pollution problem, the project offers a rare all-domestic solution to a global challenge.

Thai design company Qualy is buying most of the fishing nets being collected by EJF. Its recycling and manufacturing operations are based in Thailand, unlike similar projects in other countries that ship nets abroad for recycling. Workers at Qualy's recycling factory in the central city of Ayutthaya wash the nets before feeding them into a shredder that yields blue nylon granules to be mixed with colourants and melted down in product moulds.

During the pandemic, Qualy has shredded 700 kg (1,500 lbs) of nets to make face shields, alcohol spray bottles and push sticks for elevator buttons and ATM machines to avoid contact. ""We've sold over 100,000 push sticks already during the coronavirus pandemic,"" said marketing director Thosaphol Suppametheekulwat.

He declined to give financial details but confirmed the net recycling operation was profitable, with sales in Europe, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. ""Buying the nets supports the fishers' livelihoods, and we can make new products out of them,"" Thosaphol said. ""It's even better when it also helps save our environment.""

Japan welcomes Thai workers, including in fisheries and aquaculture

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1942468/japan-welcomes-thai-workers>

"Driven by a shortage of skilled workers, Japan is offering job opportunities in 14 work categories to foreign workers including Thai workers who have undergone occupational training in Japan previously, the Labour Ministry says. The ministry has signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with four Japanese agencies -- the Justice Ministry, Foreign Ministry, Public Health, Labour and Welfare ministry, and the National Police Office -- on cooperation in supplying skilled workers to Japan, said permanent secretary for labour Suthi Sukosol.

Priority will be given to Thai workers who have completed an occupational training programme of between three and five years in Japan under a previous Thai-Japanese cooperation agreement, he said. In the first phase of the agreement, Japan will welcome skilled workers from Thailand to work in Japan for up to five years in four out of all 14 work categories: nursing, construction industry, building cleaning, and agriculture, he said.

Other areas of work in which Japan needs to import skilled workers from overseas include machinery parts and industrial equipment production, the machine industry, electronics, information technology, ship building, car repair and maintenance, aviation, hotels, fisheries and aquaculture, food and beverage production, and hospitality. Japan wants Thailand to supply it with skilled workers in these categories as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic situation subsides, Department of Employment director-general Suchart Pornchaiwisetkul said.

The demand for foreign skilled workers in Japan is driven mainly by Japan's need to boost economic growth, he said. Saichon Akanitvong, Minister Counsellor, Office of Labour Affairs, at the Royal Thai Embassy in Tokyo, said about 60,000 to 70,000 skilled workers in these jobs will be exported to Japan each year over the next five years.

While Japan is facing a shortage of skilled workers, foreign workers undergoing job training in Japan are normally required to leave the country at the end of their training, despite the fact many Japanese employers want trained foreign workers who can stay on and work for them, Mr Saichon said. Previously, many Thai workers completed training and were given a payment of 600,000 Japanese yen each for starting new jobs when they returned home, a source said.

Japan has also offered similar job training opportunities to workers in other countries including the Philippines, Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan and Pakistan, the source said.

Office of Overseas Employment Administration director Kattiya Pandech said this was a good opportunity for skilled Thais, especially for more than 5,000 workers who have completed training in Japan before as they will be exempt from mandatory Japanese language and work skill tests if they want to go back to Japan to pursue a job in the same work area they had been trained in.

Workers who have not passed such training will still be required to pass a Japanese language and work skill test first, he said.

Indonesia, 8 IORA countries form working group to protect fisheries sector

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/24/indonesia-8-iora-countries-form-working-group-to-protect-fisheries-sector.html>

"Indonesia and eight other countries grouped under the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) established on Tuesday a regional working group on fisheries management that aims to sustain marine welfare around the world's third-largest ocean amid and post COVID-19 pandemic.

The initiative came from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Oman, Tanzania and Thailand; nine country members of IORA -- an international organization comprising 22 states bordering the Indian Ocean -- as well as from the IORA Fisheries Support Unit (FSU), a think-tank under the organization that focuses on fishery issues.

It was inaugurated on Tuesday through the 1st Meeting of IORA Cluster Group on Fisheries Management (CFGM) held virtually, in which the Indonesian delegation was represented by the Foreign Ministry and the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry.

According to a statement published on the Foreign Ministry's website, the cluster group will perform duties related to discussion over the fisheries sector in the Indian Ocean. Through this initiative, Indonesia hopes to manifest its leadership on marine and fisheries within the IORA forum, through which it also aims to strengthen its efforts in performing economic diplomacy, preventing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as improving fishermen's welfare.

"We are facing COVID-19 as a common enemy. As an organization comprising countries in the Indian Ocean, the IORA must renavigate its focus toward marine cooperation, including in the fisheries sector, said the Foreign Ministry's Asia-Pacific and African affairs director general, Desra Percaya, during the meeting.

The newly established working group is expected to roll out concrete programs to support economic recovery after the pandemic, particularly in improving fishermen's welfare, promoting marine tourism around the Indian Ocean and increasing trade and investment in the fisheries sector.

Separately, the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry's capture fishery director general, Zulficar Mochtar, revealed that more than 3.5 million Indonesian fishermen had been impacted by the pandemic, which presented a major challenge for the fishermen in addition to illegal fishing, climate change, plastic waste and fish scarcity.

“With this collective effort [the initiative] through the IORA forum, we hope to see an improvement in food sustainability and poverty reduction within the marine communities, he said.

According to the statement, the delegations produced several strategic documents in the meeting, including a draft on work programs that would be implemented in the short, medium and long term under the IORA mechanism.

Indonesia has been actively involved in IORA, including as the chair in 2015 to 2017, during which the country hosted the first IORA Summit in 2017 in Jakarta and produced the Jakarta Concord – an agreement to reinforce the commitment of IORA member countries to uphold the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the main norm in maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region. The establishment of this new working group is also a follow up of the Jakarta Concord and the IORA Action Plan for 2017 to 2021.

FAO sees Mekong as biggest source of global inland fish catch

<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50733940/fao-sees-mekong-as-biggest-source-of-global-inland-fish-catch/>

"The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has ranked the Mekong Basin as the world's most important hydrologic region or river basin for freshwater fish catches.

In its latest State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture report, the FAO said that Mekong Basin accounted for 15.2 percent of the global inland fish catch which was released in Rome recently saying 50 percent of the global catch came from the Mekong and six other basins.

The Mekong Basin spreads across Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Some of the world's largest inland fisheries come from basins or river systems that are facing severe threats from anthropogenic and natural environmental pressures.

The report said global catches from inland waters have increased steadily year on year reaching more than 12 million tonnes in 2018 which is the highest level recorded. China accounted for the biggest share of catches from inland waters in 2018 followed by India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia.

The FAO's twice-yearly Food Outlook said capture fisheries production was expected to fall 2.0 percent to about 90 million tonnes. Production from aquaculture is forecast to drop 1.4 percent to around 83 million tonnes.

Asian Development Bank calls for sustainable “Blue Economy to save our oceans

<https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/asian-development-bank-sustainable-blue-economy-to-save-our-oceans/>

"The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has called on Asia to begin focusing on building a new sustainable "blue economy. The region's development bank says that in order to preserve livelihoods and the planet, the continent must begin preserving the marine ecosystem and move away from the current "ocean economy that exploits natural resources. It has proposed several financial initiatives to assist with the transition.

ADB says that immediate action must be taken against the current "ocean economy that relies on destructive fishing and pollution practices. Instead, a new "blue economy must be built, defined by the bank as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth. It is characterised by a balance between livelihoods and marine ecosystem health.

Billions of people in Asia-Pacific – particularly poorer nations and vulnerable coastline communities – depend on healthy ocean ecosystems for their incomes, food and health. Due to climate change, pollution, destructive fishing and rapid coastal urbanisation, the productivity of our oceans has become increasingly threatened.

According to ADB's 2019 ocean report, over 60% of the 8 million tonnes of ocean plastic waste comes from Asia, along with agricultural toxic pollutants and untreated wastewater. Meanwhile, global heating is causing rising sea levels, flooding and acidification, and unless immediate action is taken, we are looking at 90% of coral reefs disappearing and loss of all fish stocks within decades time.

In order to transition to a more sustainable "blue economy, ADB announced several financial initiatives amounting to US\$5 billion over the next five years. These include "blue bonds that will invest in coastal pollution projects, circular economy, green ports and marine renewable energy in order to generate new jobs and stimulate sustainable economic growth in ocean-dependent Asian communities.

ADB will also launch sustainability-linked loans to provide finance with the achievement of environmental targets, ocean risk insurance, and payments for ecosystem services (PES), which monetises the benefits of marine management and protection.

"The action plan is also to ensure that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 – Ensuring the livelihoods, health, resiliency, and food security – of billions of people in the region, are met, said the bank in a statement.

Earlier this year, ADB launched a new venture platform to support and invest in startups in Asia offering tech-forward impact solutions to contribute to ocean protection and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Called ADB Ventures, the US\$50 million inaugural investment fund under ADB Ventures has a 17-year fund life, and will specifically target early stage and

growth stage cleantech, agriculture technology and health technology businesses that are working on climate and gender innovations.

With sustainability and awareness about ocean pollution reaching all-time highs in Asia, other funds are too looking to divert finances to address environmental crises. In December 2019, the Circulate Capital Ocean Fund (CCOF) was launched by Singapore-based Circulate Capital and is dedicated to alleviate the net financing gap of between US\$28 to US\$40 for each tonne of plastic waste to be collected and recycled across the five biggest ocean polluters in the world – China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Live Q&A Event: Film: Sustainable Futures “Communities in Action

<https://www.communityconservation.net/sustainable-futures-communities-in-action/>

"All around the world, people, in their local communities, are tackling some of the biggest global challenges... the climate, the environment, and how to sustain economies and livelihoods. The actions these communities are taking, the solutions they are finding, can inspire a way forward for all of us. "

"Sustainable Futures – Communities in Action"" is a positive and powerful new film that brings you to four such communities, each a story of local action and local solutions, each a story of people, working together, in unity for a common cause.

Travel from a neighbourhood of urban Halifax, in eastern Canada, to Nuu-chah-nulth territory on Canada's west coast, and from the community of Papendorp, South Africa, to the island of Koh Pitak, in Thailand.

Each community has its own culture and its own story, but all are working toward a future built on the power of community, on local decision-making, and on more sustainable ecosystems and economies.

Communities with people working together to thrive... and leading the way toward a sustainable world.

Thailand found failing to log fishermen’s complaints of abuse and slavery

<https://in.reuters.com/article/thailand-workers-slavery/exclusive-thailand-found-failing-to-log-fishermens-complaints-of-abuse-and-slavery-idINL8N2D4300>

"Complaints of labour abuses and slavery on Thai fishing boats are routinely going unreported by the authorities, an analysis by the Thomson Reuters Foundation revealed, raising fears that hundreds of fishermen have been denied justice and compensation.

Revelations of modern slavery at sea emerged in Thailand in 2014, prompting the nation to vow to better regulate the sector to tackle labour exploitation, trafficking and illegal fishing after the European Union threatened to ban Thai seafood imports.

But a senior official said a drive to clean up the industry was waning after exclusively obtained data revealed a large discrepancy between the official number of complaints and those recorded by four leading charities that advocate for fishermen.

Freedom of information requests filed with the government over three months showed 289 workers on fishing vessels in 11 provinces lodged labour abuse complaints between January 2015 and early 2020. There were no details regarding the outcomes.

Yet the charities said they had helped about 1,600 fishermen from these regions raise grievances since 2015 over issues from non-payment and excessive overtime to verbal and physical abuse. They feared most complaints were being dealt with off-the-books and that workers were missing out on due compensation while exploitative employers avoided scrutiny and punishment.

“For government officials, a large number of complaints means you're not performing well, and many fishermen agree to mediation because they don't want to waste time if the case goes to court, said Sunwanee Dolah from the Raks Thai Foundation. “But this results in repeated offences and wrongdoers not being punished, causing a never-ending cycle of rights violations, added Sunwanee, whose charity supports fishermen who are mainly migrants from neighbouring Cambodia and Myanmar.

Thanaporn Sriyakul, an official in the prime minister's taskforce who oversees the fishing industry, said efforts to enforce labour laws at sea had decreased “at an astonishing rate since the EU lifted its threat of a ban in January 2019.

“Government agencies have not been able to properly pursue complaints, resulting in distrust by the fisher(men), said Thanaporn, adding that some labour ministry officials did not understand their duties when it came to reporting grievances. Labour officials said individual complaints made against employers had to be registered while general ones filed about the workplace did not, and that this could explain the disparity between the newly-revealed state data and the charities' figure.

The charities, however, said all of the grievances they had helped to raise focused on employers rather than the workplace. Labour ministry inspector general Somboon Trisilanun said he “did not deny that some complaints had wrongly gone unrecorded.

The data obtained by the Thomson Reuters Foundation covered 11 provinces where most of about 63,000 fishermen who work on commercial vessels are based. It did not include all fishing regions or workers in a sector employing more than 200,000. The labour ministry said it permitted settlements provided workers received due compensation in line with Thai labour

laws. One regional labour ministry official, Sompop Khongrod, said he preferred to mediate rather than register labour complaints.

“Before submitting a complaint, if we think it's minor, we call the employer and the case is closed, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in February when he was an assistant to the head of the Office of Labour Protection and Welfare in Songkhla.

“I have settled a large number of cases in this way and they weren't registered in the system, said Sompop, who has since become head of the Yala Office of Labour Protection and Welfare. But activists and lawyers said settlements result in workers receiving less than they are entitled to, and embolden abusive bosses to act with impunity as they avoid sanctions or lawsuits.

“Workers have less negotiating power since labour inspectors tend to support employers, said Papop Siamhan, an independent lawyer with expertise in human trafficking.

“(Labour officials) don't want to record complaints because doing so is a burden for them and they are afraid of taking legal action against employers. With growing concerns about informal mediation being used to silence cases of forced labour, the Seafood Working Group - a coalition of 60 civil society groups - in March urged the United States to demote Thailand in its annual anti-trafficking report.

Last year, Thailand was ranked as a Tier 2 country - with Tier 3 being the lowest - in the U.S. State Department's closely watched global Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, which noted the country was making significant efforts to combat the crime. Activists said most fishermen were reluctant to report abuses due to fear of authorities or retribution from employers.

Steve Trent, head of the Environmental Justice Foundation, said his advocacy group had worked with government officials to encourage them to build trust with workers and put them at ease.

“However, this process can take a long time, Trent said. “If workers do not trust authority figures then they might understandably opt to go to a local NGO instead, he added.

Research by the U.N. International Labour Organization (ILO) in March found that of 50 workers in the sector who said they suffered labour abuses, none had sought help from the state.

The report found about 10% of 470 fishing and seafood workers surveyed said they had been victims of forced labour, concluding that reforms to working conditions in the industry were having an impact but that severe exploitation persisted.

COVID-19 infections force Thai Union to close fish canning factory in Ghana

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/processing-equipment/covid-19-infections-force-thai-union-to-close-fish-factory-in-ghana>

"Thai Union has closed its cannery in Ghana after one of its employees tested positive for the coronavirus. The Pioneer Food Cannery (PFC) in Tema, Ghana, was shut immediately for disinfection and cleaning on 17 April, when the company received results of the positive test. It has also collaborated with local authorities to undertake quarantining and tracing measures to mitigate potential risks, Thai Union said in a 12 May statement.

A spokesman for Thai Union told SeafoodSource via email on 13 May that the cannery was partially re-opened on 11 May on a trial basis with limited capacity "to carry out maintenance and clear certain backlogs." "In consultation with the authorities, we have decided to remain closed, but have been making every effort to reopen in phases as workers are cleared to return to work following negative tests, he said, adding that the factory will run with limited capacity for an undefined period before resuming full operations.

Thai Union said it is working closely with the government of Ghana and health authorities to carry out testing for the workers. The company is also maintaining "the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene to both protect our staff and to maintain the safety and high quality of our products."

"Although the company has not revealed the number of confirmed cases at PFC, Abraham Koomson, head of the Ghana Federation of Labor, said a total of 533 cases positive tests for coronavirus were conducted at PFC, according to Reuters.

As has been the case with many seafood producers, Bangkok, Thailand-based Thai Union has had to deal with rapidly changing business conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Earlier this month, the company said in a public statement accompanying the release of its first quarter results that the global restaurant chain Red Lobster, in which it holds a minority stake, has been hit by the lockdowns in the U.S., with all dining halls being shut down and 60 percent being open for take-out service only.

Laos to press ahead with destructive new dam on Mekong

<https://phys.org/news/2020-05-laos-destructive-mekong.html>

"Environmentalists have criticised Laos for pressing ahead with plans for another "destructive dam" on the Mekong River, a waterway already strangled by hydropower schemes. The flow of the Mekong, Southeast Asia's longest river, is interrupted by a cascade of dams in China where it is called the Lancang.

Two downstream dams the Xayaburi and Don Sahong have been built in Laos, which wants to construct seven more as it strives to live up to its billing as the "Battery of Asia". Water levels have dropped to record lows over the last year, exposing rocks and killing fish, a phenomenon blamed by villagers in Thailand and Laos on the operations of dams. On Monday, Laos'

communist government submitted proposals for the Sanakham dam close to the northeastern border with Thailand to the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

The MRC is a dam consultation body for Mekong nations, but has been accused of being toothless in stopping river projects sponsored by governments and big business. The consultation process is in fact a "rubber stamp" to get work started on the Sanakham this year in time for a 2028 completion, according to International Rivers, a key campaign group against damming. "

"What the Mekong needs immediately is the moratorium on large-scale hydropower dams... not more destructive dams that will benefit a few at the expense of communities in the Mekong basin," Paiporn Deetes of International Rivers told AFP.

The MRC says the Sanakham dam consultation includes an environmental impact assessment on the waterway and its communities. Landlocked, corrupt and poor, Laos has turned to billion-dollar hydropower schemes for investment, hoping to sell the electricity for a profit to its neighbours as well as provide energy to its remote populations.

But critics say dams have been railroaded through despite mounting evidence of ecological damage to one of the world's most biodiverse waterways. Villagers along the Mekong in Laos and Thailand say their fish catch has dwindled as the dams have come online.

Studies show sediment flow has thinned, leaving the river increasingly anaemic as it winds towards the Vietnamese delta. The Mekong feeds around 60 million people.

Mekong nations face growing threat to food security amid claims China's dams exacerbate effects of drought

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3083523/mekong-nations-face-growing-threat-food-security-amid-claims-chinas-dams>

"Fishermen in northeast Thailand say they have seen catches in the Mekong River plunge, while some farmers in Vietnam and Cambodia are leaving for jobs in cities as harvests of rice and other crops shrink. The common thread driving these events is erratic water levels in Asia's third longest waterway.

Water flows along the 4,300km (2,700 mile) Mekong shift naturally between monsoon and dry seasons, but non-governmental groups say the 11 hydroelectric dams on China's portion of the river – five of them starting operation since 2017 – have disrupted seasonal rhythms. This threatens food security for the more than 60 million people in the Lower Mekong that rely on the river for a livelihood, they say.

“Naturally, Mekong water rises and decreases slowly about three to four months from highest to lowest levels, said Teerapong Pomun, director of the Mekong Community Institute, an NGO focused on water resource management and based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

“[But now] the water levels fluctuate almost every two to three days all year, and every year, because of the dams. Beijing has taken issue with assessments that accused Chinese dams of causing shifts in Mekong water levels, especially a United States think tank report on April 13 that said China was withholding water upstream, citing satellite data.

China said the report failed to recognise that low rainfall caused a drought in 2019, the worst to hit the region in 50 years.

Whatever the argument, the food supply and livelihoods for tens of millions of people are at stake. The coronavirus pandemic is adding another twist to the troubling dynamic. “The situation in the Mekong is worrying as the prolonged drought poses dire threats to regional countries from various aspects, particularly in terms of food security, said Zhang Hongzhou, a research fellow with Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. “It will certainly adversely affect Beijing's relations with the Mekong region countries.

The Mekong River nourishes wetlands known as Asia's rice bowl thanks to the high nutrient loads the river disperses. Because so many people live off and from the river, disruptions to its water levels can be devastating.

“Farm crop yields decrease, animals die, which has a huge impact on the livelihood of people as their life depends on natural resources, said Bunleap Leang, the executive director of 3S Rivers Protection Network, an NGO that works to support dam-affected communities in northeastern Cambodia.

Mekong water levels fell to a record low in July last year, causing Vietnam, the world's third-largest rice exporter, to declare a state of emergency for the five provinces in the Mekong Delta that produce more than half the country's crop. Local authorities have warned the drought could run into May or longer. In April, the US Department of Agriculture forecast that 2020 rice yields in Vietnam would fall by 3.3 per cent from the previous estimates because of the drought and subsequent saltwater intrusion, leaving the harvest 0.9 per cent lower for the year.

Farmers are especially hard hit because when the water level falls, they have to buy more fuel for water pumps so their costs increase at the worst time, Pomun said. This is driving farmers from their rice fields to find other work, while Thai fishermen on the Mekong are pulling in empty nets, he said.

Besides the impact on agriculture, the Mekong and its tributaries make up the largest freshwater fishery in the world and catches are a mainstay of the diet for local people. Fish account for as much as 82 per cent of animal protein consumed locally, according to a report by the Mekong

River Commission (MRC), an intergovernmental organisation representing Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

The inland fisheries of the Mekong basin are a “lifeline for the people of the region, said the MRC on its website, which warns of “severe consequences from disruption to the catch, especially as the population of the Lower Mekong is estimated to rise to 100 million people by 2025 from the current 60 million.

Fishing boats in Thailand seek 50,000 workers as virus spurs migrants to leave

<https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/crimecourtsclamy/2020/05/10/fishing-boats-seek-50000-workers-as-virus-spurs-migrants-to-leave/>

"Despite adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand's fishing industry is currently looking to hire as many as 50,000 men to go out to sea aboard trawlers, said a senior government official on Saturday.

Phithoon Damsakhon, chief of the Department of Employment's provincial branch of Ranong in southern Thailand, quoted the National Fisheries Association of Thailand as reporting some 50,000 men are currently being sought for hire as skippers, mechanics and other crewmembers aboard fishing boats based in several coastal provinces of the country.

Tens of thousands of Myanmar migrant workers, earlier employed by the fishing industry either on shore or offshore, have already left for their home country and many others are believed to follow suit, thus aggravating labor shortages in Thailand's fishing sector, Phithoon said.

Many of those migrant workers had been gradually upgraded from being unskilled employees to skilled ones until they have called it quits over the last several years, he said. He suggested the Thais, who might be currently jobless due to the pandemic situation, to go for such fishing occupations available aboard seagoing trawlers, many of which are being anchored off idly in Ranong and other coastal provinces.

China’s control of the Mekong through financing and construction of dams

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/chinas-control-of-the-mekong/>

"A recently published report by Eyes on Earth, Inc. has pointed the finger at Chinese dams holding back water as having significantly contributed to the major drought impacting the Mekong River in Southeast Asia. The drought's effects have been felt by millions and hamper efforts to support development in the region. Whether it is done maliciously or out of lack of concern, controlling the flow of the Mekong is another way China exerts influence over its immediate region.

The report's findings, which have been contested by China, added further weight to the growing concern over Beijing's control of the vital waterway, which begins in China as the Lancang then flows through Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, supporting over 60 million people.

Water levels in the Lower Mekong were recorded at levels unseen in 50 years and have substantially impacted fishing and agricultural activity – which includes 20 percent of the world's freshwater fish catch.

Vietnam, where the Mekong flows into the sea, has been particularly impacted. The Mekong enables Vietnam to be the world's second largest coffee producer and third largest rice exporter. Vietnam accounts for an estimated 42 percent of the Mekong's irrigation equipped land and the river supports tens of millions of Vietnamese, including many subsistence farmers and disadvantaged poor.

The report provides evidence to back up concerns that Chinese dams have held water from the Mekong to fill local reservoirs for long-term storage. China has constructed 11 giant dams along the mountainous territory of the Upper Mekong to sustain its ever-increasing energy needs.

The management of water flows has long been a concern for many living along the river. The situation is particularly exacerbated by fact that there are no water treaties or agreements that allow the sharing of data between China and Lower Mekong countries.

Dams further down the river, built and proposed, also pose a significant threat to the health and vitality of the Mekong. The proposed Chinese-backed Sambor Dam in Cambodia would potentially generate more power than is in fact used by Cambodia.

However, its intended use would be for exporting a majority of its generation to Vietnam and Thailand. Environmental impact reports revealed the dam would cause major disruption to migratory fish flows and the movement of nutrient-rich sediment into Vietnam. However, these warnings of an environmental disaster in the making appeared to have initially gone unheeded. A result of lobbying from international NGOs and internal reporting, in March this year the Cambodian government decided on a decade-long dam moratorium on the mainstream of the river. While this places the Sambor Dam on hold, the government has not ruled out potential construction on tributaries.

The Cambodian moratorium leaves Laos, which operationalized two major dams in 2019, as the only Lower Mekong country pursuing hydropower on the mainstream of the river. A landlocked country, Laos has strongly pursued hydropower both to meet local energy needs and also as an export product. Partnering with the Chinese government and entrepreneurs through the Belt and Road Initiative, the opaque Laotian Government has approved over 140 dams along the Mekong and its tributaries.

Heavily indebted, Laos stands at a high risk of collapsing under the weight of its debt to China, leaving it dangerously susceptible influence from Beijing. When visiting Thailand in 2019, United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo singled out China's decision to limit the flow of water as the main reason for drought conditions plaguing the region. Alan Basit, president of Eyes on Earth, added weight to Pompeo's remarks by stating that “the data does not support China's position that its dams are not contributing to drought impacts. China carefully controls and manages the data from its dams.

However, the Eyes on Earth Inc. report has placed a spotlight on the Upper Mekong, showing that for half of 2019 China held back vast volumes of vital water from flowing down the river. That significantly added to the impact of the drought on the millions of people who are supported by the Mekong.

Whether through its own dams or the financing and construction of hydropower projects in other countries, China is largely in the driver's seat when it comes to the Mekong. It has been previously noted that scientific reports have had little impact on regional policymakers, though in recent times some progress on dam moratoriums has been achieved.

However, the increasing evidence of self-interest from China, coupled with the exacerbating effects of climate change and growing georegional tensions, may see impacted states begin to complain more loudly about the Mekong's mismanagement.

In the Mekong, a confluence of calamities

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/28/in-the-mekong-a-confluence-of-calamities/>

"Over the past year, severe drought exacerbated by upstream hydropower dams has throttled agricultural productivity, devastated fisheries, and threatened the livelihoods of millions of people in the Mekong River Basin. The coronavirus pandemic is compounding this situation, disrupting supply chains and increasing price volatility for rice and other staples.

While Mekong governments have assured their populations of secure food supplies, concerns are growing around the affordability and accessibility of food for the region's most vulnerable populations. Nowhere are these risks of growing food insecurity more evident than in Cambodia.

For farmers and fishers throughout the Mekong River Basin, the coronavirus couldn't have hit at a worse time. In April 2019, the region began suffering a prolonged and severe drought. An El Nino weather pattern led to widespread water shortages, as the monsoon rains which typically fall from May to October and usher in planting of the primary rice crop failed to appear. Reservoirs across the region began to run dry, and the waters of the lower Mekong dropped to historic lows.

Chinese dams on the upper Mekong worsened the drought's impact, restricting water from flowing downstream where it could have alleviated record dry conditions. Agricultural communities have suffered greatly. By July, Thailand declared an emergency in 12 provinces and asked farmers to delay planting rice crops to avoid using what little water was left for vulnerable households. Reservoir levels remained low throughout the rainy season, and in early 2020, Bangkok deployed the military to implement drought disaster mitigation in 43 provinces. Preliminary estimates point to a sharp drop of between 40 percent and 54 percent for the country's off-season rice production. Meanwhile in Laos, water levels on the Mekong River were recorded nearly 7 meters below normal in Vientiane.

Because of the arid conditions, farmers were able to plant rice only on around 40 percent of the country's arable land, and the government estimated that production for the year would be 17,500 tons lower than in 2018. Vietnam has faced similar challenges but fared better. With freshwater flows in the Mekong diminished, saline seawater pushed farther into the country's delta heartland, eventually damaging over 30,000 hectares of rice fields.

The government moved quickly to work with farmers to shift rice-planting seasons and avoid risking the main crop, and as a result, the country's production is anticipated to drop by only around 3 percent in 2020.

Cambodia has been hit particularly hard by the drought. By December, some 45,000 hectares of rice paddy had been damaged, and 16 of the country's 25 provinces were facing freshwater shortages. The government recommended that farmers forgo a second rice crop to conserve water, and aid organizations began to share reports of farmers struggling under the debt burden of failed crops. As a still developing nation, Cambodia remains heavily reliant on agriculture to sustain livelihoods and provide food.

Subsistence farming is common the United Nations Development Program estimates that over 70 percent of Cambodian farms engage in some version of the practice and the agriculture sector employs more than 30 percent of the population, contributing more than one-fifth of the national GDP. The majority of farmed land is used for rice, and farmers regularly take out loans to cover the cost of supplies necessary for their harvest. For many, a poor or destroyed crop yield can mean financial ruin.

At the same time that the region's agriculture has been starved of water, the country's fish catch has collapsed. The Mekong River system is the world's largest freshwater fishery, typically producing more than 2.6 million tons of fish each year.

A quarter of this comes from Cambodia and most of that from the Tonle Sap Lake. While heavy monsoons in 2018 led to a larger than usual catch, changes in flow from hydropower dams and climate change, as well as overfishing, have led to steeply declining catches in recent years.

Thai oceans see more fish and dugongs amid coronavirus closures

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/04/27/thai-oceans-see-more-fish-and-dugongs-amid-coronavirus-closures>

"Thai oceans are seeing more fish and rare marine animals since being closed to tourists due to the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservations said in a Facebook post that officials sent out to inspect coral reefs saw a clear increase in the amount of fish among them. "'From the survey, we found that since the national park's closure over the past month, we are clearly seeing an increase in the amount of fish,'" the posting said. "

"For example the parrot fish, which are usually seen in groups of five to six - we are now seeing them in groups of 15 to 20.'" It said coral reefs at the Hat Wanakon National Park in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, around 240km south of Bangkok, are not showing new signs of deterioration. The department said a marine animal conservationist had reported seeing dugongs on a daily basis, sometimes in groups of around five to six, near the island of Ko Libong in southern Thailand.

Dugongs are herbivorous marine mammals that are listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The wildlife department had also released drone footage of a herd of around 30 dugongs near Ko Libong it shot on Tuesday.

Thailand has closed all national parks, malls and most shops and meeting places to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The country has been under a state of emergency since March 26 which will last until at least April 30.

Thai Navy assures Phuket fishing fleet clear of COVID-19

<https://www.thephuketnews.com/navy-assures-phuket-fishing-fleet-clear-of-covid-19-75741.php>

"The Vice Admiral Cherngchai Chomcherngpat of the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command today (Apr 17) announced that Phuket's fishing fleet was COVID-free as he led inspections of fishing crews as part of the efforts to help prevent the spread of virus.

V/Adm Cherngchai also serves as Director of the Third Area Command's Maritime Enforcement Coordination Centre (THAI-MECC Area 3), a body set up to regulate and enforce laws protecting workers in the fishing industry in the wake of the fishing slavery scandal that rocked the Thai fishing industry a handful of years ago and led to Thailand facing dramatic economic punishments from the EU and the US if the country did not improve its efforts to prevent human trafficking.

Today, the focus was on COVID-19 and preventing the spread of the virus throughout the fishing industry, and came after an “illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing boat seized by the Navy in 2016 blazed near the harbour last night. During today's visit to Phuket Fishing Pier, V/Adm Cherngchai and his entourage visited the Phuket Port In and Port Out Control Center (Phuket PIPO), commanded by Capt Kriangkrai Lai-ngen of the Royal Thai Navy.

The visit was held to give the officers encouragement, hear about their problems firsthand, hand out virus personal protective equipment and to observe fishing boat inspections. “The operation result is in accordance with the regulations. Staff have good morale, was the official appraisal of operations at the centre.

“Although all land, air and sea ports of entry to Phuket have been closed due to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the fisheries industry is allowed to continue to operate as they provide essential consumer goods. No other marine activities are allowed in Phuket, V/Adm Cherngchai explained. “Fishing is an important industry which directly affects the economy of Phuket – and it has not been affected by COVID-19, V/Adm Cherngchai proclaimed.

Thai-MECC Area 3 officers instructed the PIPO officials to wear protective equipment while conducting inspections, and handed them face shields and sanitiser. PIPO officers were also ordered to make sure the fishing fleet also took measures to protect their crews – and not to bring “risk groups” into the area.

At present, about 240 fishing boats enter and leave Phuket waters each day, of which about 90 boats are inspected. Only one to two of these are considered among “risk groups that need to be inspected, it was explained during the visit today.

Thailand goes into curfew as coronavirus cases surge close to 2,000

<https://sea.mashable.com/culture/9878/thailand-goes-into-curfew-as-coronavirus-cases-surge-close-to-2000>

"Want to leave your house in the middle of the night to hang out with your friends, grab a quick supper, or go on a quick jog around the neighborhood? Well, if you're in Thailand, tough luck. The Thai government has imposed a curfew throughout the nation.

Beginning April 3, all residents are banned from leaving their homes between the hours of 10pm to 4am in the government's efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Also known as COVID-19, the coronavirus pandemic has taken over the nation with 1,875 positive cases of the virus reported and a total death toll of 15 as of April 2.

The capital city of Bangkok remains the hot spot of new coronavirus infections, according to The Thaiger. Thailand Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha announced the curfew on April 2, calling for the public to not panic buy and stock up on food as they're still allowed to go out during the

day, as long as they observe social distancing rules. "I won't let anyone hoard the products and take advantage of people during this difficult time," he said, according to the Bangkok Post.

The government will also be setting up outlets to distribute face masks and plans to introduce economic stimulus packages, including financial aid, debt suspension, and a liquidity boost. Of course, there are exemptions to the curfew restrictions.

According to the Bangkok Post, this includes: -- medical and banking personnel -- logistic workers handling consumer goods, -- agricultural produce, pharmaceutical products, as well as medical supplies and equipment -- workers for newspapers, fuel, and postal services -- products bound for exports and imported goods -- employees working night shifts -- individuals heading to or from airports with necessary documents stating their purpose -- officials carrying out official orders and those who have received prior permission from officials to leave for emergencies.

The Thai government will also begin blocking all travels into the country, including those by Thai nationals, to prepare quarantine facilities for travelers. The semi-travel ban also begins on April 3 and will continue to April 15."

"In the meantime, agencies will prepare the venues and coordinate with Thai embassies to ensure all Thai returnees will be quarantined and get proper medical checks," the prime minister said, according to the Bangkok Post.

Although the new ban doesn't apply to people who've already received permission to travel to Thailand, spokesman for the government's Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) Taweessin Visanuyothin urged affected travelers to contact their local Thai embassies for further instructions.

Panic buying, lockdowns may drive world food inflation “FAO, analysts

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-food-security/panic-buying-lockdowns-may-drive-world-food-inflation-fao-analysts-idUSKBN21808G>

"Lockdowns and panic food buying due to the coronavirus pandemic could ignite world food inflation even though there are ample supplies of staple grains and oilseeds in key exporting nations, a senior economist at FAO and agricultural analysts said.

The world's richest nations poured unprecedented aid into the global economy as coronavirus cases ballooned across Europe and the United States, with the number of deaths in Italy outstripping those in mainland China, where the virus originated.

With over 270,000 infections and more than 11,000 deaths, the epidemic has stunned the world and drawn comparisons with periods such as World War Two and the 1918 Spanish flu

pandemic. “All you need is panic buying from big importers such as millers or governments to create a crisis, said Abdolreza Abbassian, senior economist at the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). “It is not a supply issue, but it is a behavioral change over food security, he told Reuters by phone from Rome, the FAO headquarters. “What if bulk buyers think they can't get wheat or rice shipments in May or June? That is what could lead to a global food supply crisis.

Consumers across the world from Singapore to the United States have queued at super markets in recent weeks to stock up on items ranging from rice and hand sanitizers to toilet paper. The global benchmark Chicago wheat futures rose more than 6% this week, the biggest weekly gain in nine months, while rice prices in Thailand, the world's 2nd largest exporter of the grain, have climbed to the highest since August 2013.

France's grain industry is scrambling to find enough trucks and staff to keep factories and ports running as the panic buying of pasta and flour coincides with a surge in wheat exports. Restrictions imposed by some European Union countries at their borders with other member states in response to the pandemic are also disrupting food supplies, representatives of the industry and farmers said.

However, global wheat stocks at the end of the crop marketing year in June are projected to rise to 287.14 million tonnes, up from 277.57 million tonnes a year ago, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates. World rice stocks are projected at 182.3 million tonnes as compared with 175.3 million tonnes a year ago.

Logistics are likely to be a major global issue, analysts said. “There is about 140 million tonnes of corn that goes in ethanol in the United States and some of that can be used for food as it won't be needed for fuel, given the drop in oil prices, said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at brokerage IKON Commodities “The concern is having food at the right time in the right place.

Coronavirus: a seafood analysts perspective <https://thefishsite.com/articles/coronavirus-a-seafood-analysts-perspective> "As the coronavirus outbreak continues to spread, The Fish Site caught up with Dr Beyhan de Jong, food and agribusiness specialist at Rabobank, to try and assess its impacts – in China and beyond.

“I was asked to give a presentation on this at last week's North Atlantic Seafood Forum. The coronavirus is still very much a wildcard – we don't know how much it will spread so it's hard to read the markets right now – but we came up with four different scenarios, none of them good, reflects Dr de Jong.

“And since I first prepared the presentation, we've already gone from the least bad option to somewhere between the third and second worst, she adds. As a result, looking at the macro-economic situation, Dr de Jong predicts that the impact of the virus looks likely to be closer to that of the 2008 global financial crisis of 2008-2009, rather than to SARS – due to the fact that

the Chinese and global economies are much more closely linked since the outbreak of the latter, back in 2003.

“The Chinese economy and the global economy are so closely linked, with many countries heavily dependent on China for manufacturing their goods, as a market for their exports and as a source of tourists, she explains. “If the forecast for the Chinese economy to grow 2 percent slower than anticipated in 2020 is correct, then global growth rates will drop by 1 percent.

Looking at the food and agriculture sectors, Dr de Jong notes that the restaurant and food service businesses are being hit the hardest – a trend compounded by the timing of the outbreak in the run-up to Chinese New Year. And, although many provinces of China are beginning to lift movement restrictions, there's no sign of an immediate recovery.

“The initial forecast was for the Chinese economy to start to rebound in Q2, but we now think that it's not going to happen until Q3 or Q4. And, looking ahead, while industrial production is beginning to rebound, consumer spending is lagging behind, explains the Rabobank analyst. And the slow rebound in consumer spending is not just hitting the Chinese food service sector.

“The Chinese food service sector is being hit as consumers in China are eating at home, while the sector in countries such as Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam is being impacted too, due to the decrease in tourism numbers, she says.

Looking specifically at the seafood sector, Dr de Jong says that local production has not been too severely impacted other than in Hubei – the province at the heart of the outbreak – where freshwater production of species such as crayfish has been reduced by the raft of governmental restrictions.

TUNA 2020 joins list of seafood trade shows postponed due to coronavirus outbreak

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/tuna-2020-joins-list-of-seafood-trade-shows-postponed-due-to-coronavirus-outbreak>

"Infofish has decided to postpone TUNA 2020, its tuna conference in Bangkok, Thailand, due to concern about the outbreak of COVID-19. The 16th edition of the World Tuna Trade Conference & Exhibition, which was scheduled to take place from 27 to 29 May this year, will be rescheduled to ensure the health of attendees, the organizer said in a statement.

“We realize that this may come as a disappointment to conference delegates, exhibitors, co-organizers, sponsors, supporters, collaborators, and visitors, Infofish said. The organizer said by the end of February, its exhibition hall had been booked out, and attendance from speakers and participants had been already confirmed.

“The decision to reschedule was therefore a difficult one, driven by our responsibility to ensure the best interests of all those concerned, and particularly their good health. Our prime consideration was the safety and wellbeing of all those who would have attended TUNA 2020 this year, Infofish said, adding that it is closely monitoring the situation surrounding the coronavirus outbreak and will announce new dates after considering global developments.

The deadly virus, reportedly tracked to a seafood market in Wuhan, China, has become a global concern. Seafood Expo North America/Seafood Processing North America, scheduled to take place 15 to 17 March in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., has also been postponed by the event's organizer, Diversified Communications

The decision was made on 3 March in response to growing concerns over the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, according to Diversified Communications Group Vice President Liz Plizga. “This decision has been difficult because of the major importance of this event to the industry, Plizga said in a letter to attendees.

“We heard from those of you who were concerned about health, safety, and travel restrictions, and given the short time before the scheduled event date, and upcoming logistics, we have determined that postponement at this time is unavoidable.

In Vietnam, a government-sponsored exhibition that was previously planned to take place in the Mekong Delta in March has been rescheduled to June in response to the epidemic.

The Vietshrimp Aquaculture International Fair 2020, sponsored by Vietnam's General Department of Fisheries and the Can Tho City government, will now take place 3 to 5 June in Can Tho. It had been set to take place 25 to 27 March.

And the organizers of the Aquafeed Horizons 2020 conference, scheduled to take place 24 March in Bangkok, Thailand, pulled the plug on 24 February. “This was a very difficult decision, and we waited as long as we could in the hope that the coronavirus epidemic would slow, but unfortunately we are not seeing that, Suzi Dominy, the publisher of show organizer Aquafeed.com, said in a press release.

“We are sorry to disappoint our delegates but their safety and well-being, as well as that of our presenters and staff has to come first. It would have been irresponsible to go ahead with an international meeting in this region; we really didn't have a choice.

The rapid outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has killed 3,284 people in the world, mainly in mainland China, with several cases confirmed in China and other countries, including in South Korea, Italia, Iran, the United States, Japan, Thailand, and Germany, South China Morning Post reported 5 March.

Mekong River Committee releases report on livelihoods of fishing communities along the Mekong

<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50698419/mrc-story-on-livelihoods-of-fishing-communities-along-the-mekong>

"The Mekong River Committee (MRC) today released a report on safeguarding livelihoods for fishing communities in Mekong countries, including Cambodia. In this report, MRC has reviewed the community at Dun Ei, a fishing village 180 kilometres northwest of Phnom Penh, where has been making a living through fishing along the Pursat River for generations.

In recent years, however, river structures, such as dams and dikes, have been preventing fish from migrating upstream to their spawning and rearing grounds. For most of the year, fish have become scarce along the Pursat River, forcing villagers to leave their homes in search of work. Those left behind face difficult livelihood and an uncertain future.

To address the problem, the Cambodian Government partnered with the U.S. Department of Interior (USDO), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to install a fish passage.

A concrete ladder was constructed at Kbal Hong Dam in the Pursat River, a main tributary of Tonle Sap Lake, Southeast Asia's largest lake, to provide a route for more than 100 fish species to swim past the 4-metre-high barrier, reopening around 100 kilometres of the river.

Horm Sovon, a 49-year-old fisher who is among hundreds of villagers to benefit from the project, said she could only catch fish three months per year. Now she is catching less fish than before, but there are fish to catch every day. "I have a stable income now, and I am happy that other villagers both upstream and downstream are also able to catch fish, she underlined. The situation faced by the villagers at Dun Ei is typical of a wider problem affecting communities across the Mekong River Basin.

In the Lower Mekong Basin, a total fish catch was estimated at 2.3 million tones (US\$ 11 billion). The sector supports the livelihoods of more than 60 million people. However, the fisheries sector is threatened by tens of thousands of dams, dikes, weirs, and other water structures that have been built to store water for irrigation.

According to the MRC, many of these structures make it difficult for fish to pass, affecting fish reproduction across the region. Together with pressure from other water resources development projects, such as hydropower dams, increased populations, and exploitative fishing, the MRC Council Study estimated that the net present value (NPV) of the fisheries sector will decline by US\$16.5 million by 2020 and US\$22.6 million by 2040 in all the lower Mekong countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

The Kbal Hong ladder is considered one of the most effective fish passages in the Mekong region and stands as an example of effective regional collaboration.

“This successful case implies that the construction of fish passages in the basin and some of its tributaries is essential, Dr. An Pich Hatda, MRC Secretariat Chief Executive Officer, said.

“Improved fish production will enhance the resilience of the entire ecosystem, benefit local economies and sustained local community livelihoods.

Deputy Director of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute, Tob Chann Aun, attributes its success to the technical support provided by the international partners, and also to the MRC guidelines, which enabled identification of the Kbal Hong Dam as a priority for fish passage construction. “Kbal Hong fish passage is a unique demonstration site that can be replicated elsewhere in the country or in the region, Mr. Chann Aun said.

The Kbal Hong fish passage will serve as a model for 22 fish passages that have been prioritised by the Cambodian Government along the Pursat River. Other countries in the Mekong region are also benefiting from this joint effort. Ten barriers in Lao PDR, six in Thailand and three in Viet Nam have been identified for fish passage construction.

Installations of fish passage in Lao PDR have been completed while preparations for fish passage construction in Thailand are well underway. “I believe, through this partnership, we will be able to protect and restore river habitat, said Mr. Boonsong Sricharoenham, Senior Fisheries Ecology Expert of Thai Department of Fisheries.

Southeast Asia’s dugongs may disappear soon

<https://theaseanpost.com/article/southeast-asias-dugongs-may-disappear-soon>

"In 2019, two baby dugongs were found alive after they washed ashore in Krabi and Trang provinces, in Thailand, but sadly died not long after they were rescued. The event even caught the attention of Hollywood star, Leonardo DiCaprio who posted about it on social media, drawing much needed attention to the plight of Thailand's endangered dugongs.

The two baby dugongs were taken into care and named, Marium and Yamil by Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya. In the local Yawi language of Southern Thailand, the names given to the two dugongs mean ‘lady of the sea’ and ‘handsome man of the sea’, respectively.

Unfortunately, 8-month-old Marium succumbed to an infection that was exacerbated by ingesting marine plastic waste. According to Chaiyapruk Werawong, head of the Trang province marine park, Marium died from a “blood infection and pus in her stomach,” adding that small amounts of plastic waste was found in her intestinal tract.

The Department of Marine and Coastal Resources said the three-month-old Yamil died from a blood infection at the Phuket Marine Biological Centre. Thailand's Natural Resources and Environment Minister, Varawut Silpa-archa offered a public apology for failing to save Yamil's life. "We are so sorry, we still don't understand dugongs well enough," he said in a statement. Prior to the two dugong deaths, seven of these docile mammals were also found dead on Thai beaches in the same year.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species has listed dugongs as vulnerable to extinction on a global scale. Commonly known as "sea cows," dugongs graze peacefully on seagrass in shallow coastal waters. It has a large range in Southeast Asia's coastal waters.

Human activities such as the destruction and modification of habitat, coastal development, pollution, fishing activities, vessel strikes, unsustainable hunting or poaching and tourism, have threatened the mammals' ecosystem.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah's (UMS) Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI) director, Professor Dr Rossita Shapawi said that the accelerating loss of seagrass beds is the most important factor behind the dwindling dugong populations in Sabah and Malaysia in general. "Dugongs feed exclusively on seagrass, especially young shoots and roots.

Excessive sedimentation due to uncontrolled anthropogenic activities mainly due to coastal development will smother the seagrass bed, she said. This is the main cause of the dugong's disappearing habitat and food source. Dugongs are the world's only vegetarian marine mammal and can consume up to 40 kilograms (kg) of seagrass a day.

Seagrass, dubbed 'Flowers of the Ocean', are unique flowering plants that have evolved to live in marine habitats. Although seagrasses account for less than 0.2 percent of all plant life the world's oceans, they're responsible for 10 percent of the carbon stored in oceans annually, and they are up to 35 times far more efficient at sequestering carbon than the rainforest. Southeast Asia has the highest diversity of seagrass species.

Thai Union donates tuna to coronavirus epicenter in China

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/thai-union-donates-tuna-to-coronavirus-epicenter-in-china>

"Thai Union has sent more than 52,000 cans of King Oscar tuna as humanitarian assistance to Wuhan, the city currently at the center of the COVID-19/coronavirus outbreak in China, Thai Union said in a statement on 14 February. The value of the shipments was not provided.

The donation by Thai Union China, a subsidiary of the tuna giant, was conducted through a local logistics service and an online food delivery company in China.

The first shipment was delivered to people working on the Wuhan Leishenshan Hospital Project, one of two new hospitals being built for COVID-19 patients. The second was given to more than 15 hospitals in Wuhan, including Wuhan Union Hospital – the main hospital treating people that have contracted the deadly virus.

Thai Union Global Director of Corporate Affairs and Sustainability Darian McBain said the company believes it has a responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance through what it calls “tuna aid, to help support people in regions where the company operates.

In response to the epidemic, other Chinese seafood companies have also been donating seafood to the hardest-hit areas, a move that also helps them meet regional and national government appeals to patriotism.

The rapid outbreak of the coronavirus, with an origin reportedly tracked to a seafood market in Wuhan, has killed more than 1,700 people in mainland China, with many more cases confirmed in China and other countries, including in the United States, Japan, Thailand, and Germany, South China Morning Post reported 18 February.

The city of Wuhan is a major logistics hub for China's seafood trade in the central region of the country, and the virus hit the market at its busiest time of the year. The city is also central to the trade in freshwater species like crabs given its location in Hubei Province, at the heart of China's freshwater crustacean industry.

International seafood buyers urge Thailand to stand strong on fisheries reforms

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/international-seafood-buyers-urge-thailand-to-stand-strong-on-fisheries-reforms>

"Several retailers and buyers sourcing seafood from Thailand have called on the Southeast Asian nation to preserve major regulations in the fisheries sector amidst fears that recently-made reforms may be rolled back. In an open letter posted on the website of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) last week, the buyers said they “urge the Royal Thai government to continue the path of reform and work constructively with national actors to achieve a transition towards a legal, ethical and sustainable fishing sector.

The signatories included ETI, its corporate members including Aldi South, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, and Waitrose; German companies Aldi North, Lidl International, REWE, and EDEKE; U.S. companies Cargill, Kroger, Albertsons Companies, and Whole Foods; as well as the UK's Seafood Ethics Action Alliance (SEA Alliance), which represents companies engaged in multi-billion-dollar global seafood exports from Thailand.

The Thai government has made progress in protecting the marine environment and workers from exploitation, the letter said. It added that the buyers will continue to monitor and support collaboration between the government, seafood suppliers, and civil society organizations to ensure that the crucial reforms continue to be implemented effectively.

“We understand that new reforms are challenging but nevertheless we stand with the Thai government in supporting the details of this transition and stand ready to assist in achieving successful outcomes for key stakeholders in the fishing sector, the letter said. Oxfam America Senior Advisor Art Prapha said the letter is part of an effort to protect an estimated 650,000 workers, including large numbers of migrant laborers, from exploitation and abuse.

ETI and 23 other organizations, all members of the Seafood Working Group, had released a joint statement in December last year following the U.S. government's decision to suspend trade preferences to Thailand.

The statement called on the Thai government to take actions to get the benefits reinstated, including reforming labor legislation, ending the legal and judicial harassment of labor rights defenders and collaborating with worker organizations to end labor exploitation.

Due to progress made by the Thai government in taking on labor issues and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, in January 2019, the European Commission removed its yellow card from Thailand. In the past few years, Thailand has undertaken a major upgrade of its fisheries governance in order to address the E.U.'s concerns. But it's tough measures resulted in protests from fishermen affected.

About 8,000 Thai fishing trawler operators and crew from 22 coastal provinces rallied outside the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives on 17 December to demand the government adopt their 11-point request submitted earlier to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Their demands included calling on the government to ease fishing restrictions, address labor shortages, and assist with the sector's mounting debt.

The fishermen also requested the government to spend THB 10 billion (USD 330.3 million, EUR 298 million) to buy fishing boats from owners whose business had collapsed because of the new fishing laws.

The Thai government has since eased a number of anti-IUU regulations following the protests, and has offered compensation to fishermen whose boats were banned from fishing because they did not meet the government's minimum requirements under its new anti-IUU restrictions.

How China's reach across Asia is choking the Mekong River

<https://www.thetelegraph.com/news/article/How-China-s-reach-across-Asia-is-choking-the-15017479.php>

"The former chief of Pak Chim, a tiny village on a tributary of the Mekong River, remembers clearly the moment he knew his hamlet would be no more. It was a decade ago. A few hundred residents of Pak Chim and nearby villages along the snaking Nam Ou River gathered. They were summoned by officials from the Laotian government and China's state-owned Sinohydro Corp.

Dams were coming, they were told. Not just one, but a cascade of seven Chinese-built dams planned along the Nam Ou, once one of the Mekong's best tributaries for fishing and for farming in the rich sediment. The villagers, the officials said, would all have to be relocated, pushed farther back from the river that has defined their lives.

Officials sought to sway them with promises of new homes, electricity and roads. Impoverished Laotians would become rich. The landlocked country would fulfill its destiny of becoming the ""battery of Asia.""

""They told us that this was the sacrifice that had to be made for progress,"" said 55-year-old Nok, the former village chief, providing only his nickname for fear of reprisal over perceived criticism of his government. ""Even then, we were not sure about their promises."

"The reality that has unfolded over the past 10 years, however, has been more dire than residents could have imagined. The Mekong River and its biodiversity-rich tributaries - the lifeline for more than 60 million people in Southeast Asia - dropped to their lowest levels in a century last summer. A section of the river has changed from muddy brown to sky blue. Experts say this is a sign of the river's compromised health, the result of a dramatic drop in sediment. Fish supplies are scarce.

Rice cannot be planted on dried-up banks starved of nutrients. Entire ecosystems are being forever changed. The region is at ""a tipping point,"" said Brian Eyster, director of the Southeast Asia program at the Stimson Center and author of a book on the Mekong. If the dam-building continues unchecked, the Mekong basin is on a path toward ""ecological peril,"" accelerated by climate change.

The last days of the river, he added, could be ""here and now."" The dams on the Nam Ou and others across the Mekong basin are part of what China calls its Belt and Road Initiative, a vast network of projects that seeks to cement Beijing's influence across Asia and beyond. Each development - dams, ports and railways, among others - gives China another long-term foothold in a nation's economy and trade.

A journey down the Nam Ou by The Washington Post traced the hardships and broken promises for the Mekong river system as more dams go up - about half of them built by Chinese companies.

In Laos, 60 dams dot the Mekong and its tributaries. Under construction: 63 more, despite a major dam collapse last year that claimed dozens of lives. The dam projects along the Nam Ou cover more than 80 percent of its length. There are more than 370 dams planned along the Mekong's 2,700-mile course from China through the heart of Southeast Asia, linking Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Waterways such as the Nam Ou are viewed by the Chinese as "not a river, but a laboratory," said Pianporn Deetes, an environmental activist with International Rivers who has made several trips to the Nam Ou to chronicle the impact of dam-building. "They want to own the whole thing," she said, "to just play with it." The town of Muang Khua once survived on the backpackers who arrived overland from Vietnam, eager to travel along the Nam Ou to Luang Prabang, one of the world's most scenic river journeys. But the wooden longboats now sit empty. Next to the departure point are instructions for tourists in English on how to get around the dams that block their path.

What most worries the villagers are the red markings that brand their homes. The lines are estimates of where the water level will rise when the Nam Ou 4 dam upstream is operational in October. Earlier this year, representatives from Sinohydro arrived with a clear message: Leave or you will be flooded out.

But the Sinohydro envoys never came back, and the villagers are unsure what to do. "There are so many rumors," said one boatman, who, like many interviewed, spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of government retribution. "

"We have no idea if we can stay here or if we have to leave." For now, river-based communities along this stretch of the Nam Ou are trying to live life as they did before: panning for specks of gold during the low tide and luring fish by cutting a type of grass that attracts them. As they await the finished dam, they also worry about the unpredictability of the water levels, which have been fluctuating wildly.

The sounds that define stretches of the river without dams - roosters crowing, the faint hum of engines fitted on the backs of villagers' longboats - fade around the Nam Ou 2 dam, the first phase of the project to go online.

This river was a key navigation path between the mountainous provinces in northern Laos, but the dams have made travel by boat cumbersome. Now, this stretch of the Nam Ou below the dam has effectively been abandoned. Some 2,300 households have been forced to relocate from the river and can no longer depend on it for daily life.

The dams have cut off the natural downstream flow of the river and blocked the flow of sediment from the towering karst formations.

We encounter one man fishing who said he had traveled from Luang Prabang, an ancient city on the Mekong to the south, because the fish around the dam are abundant. But that, too, is unnatural. The fish are trapped between two dams and don't swim as far or as fast as they used to, making them easy prey. Some villagers have tried to continue farming along the river but say the uneven water levels make it harder for them and their livestock.

How Thai Union rapidly pivoted to a greener business strategy

<https://www.greenbiz.com/article/how-thai-union-rapidly-pivoted-greener-business-strategy>

"Back in 2015, Thai Union had run into choppy waters. The multi-billion dollar seafood giant behind global tinned fish brands John West in the United Kingdom, Chicken of the Sea in the United States and King Oscar in Norway, among many others, had a PR shipwreck in its sights, and needed to shift coordinates swiftly.

Exposes in the New York Times, Associated Press and The Guardian had laid bare human rights abuses, forced labor and environmentally destructive fishing methods in Asian supply chains for canned seafood and prawns that ended up in U.K. supermarkets, placing Thai Union one of the biggest producers in the world firmly in the media and campaigner firing line.

Greenpeace didn't mince its words, calling on consumers and investors to boycott the company, accusing it of "sacrificing the world's oceans" and "destructive, wasteful fishing practices from its supply chains." "For far too long Thai Union Group has passed the blame onto others and hidden behind ineffective policies," Greenpeace campaigner Graham Forbes said at the time. "

"Until this industry giant takes responsibility and demonstrates real leadership, we will work to ensure that every single customer knows it's not just tuna that comes with buying one of its tainted brands." Yet fast-forward five years, and the company is top-ranked in both the latest Dow Jones Sustainability Index for food products, as well as the inaugural Seafood Stewardship Index of the 30 largest seafood companies globally, with particular commendations for its supply chain traceability, sourcing policies, and environmental footprint.

Even Greenpeace is on board (PDF), striking an agreement in 2017 that will see the campaign group monitor Thai Union's progress towards mutually agreed targets on human rights and sustainable fishing.

The firm is navigating a turnaround towards more sustainable practices albeit with some way to go that many, many corporates may have to chart in the coming years, or face increasingly angry regulators, investors and consumers, not to mention fierce competition from greener challengers and widespread market disruption. It is a binary choice between seeking change or being changed; sinking or swimming.

And Thai Union, according to CEO Thiraphong Chansiri, chose to swim. ""We are one of the leading seafood companies in Thailand,"" he said in a 2018 interview. ""It is our responsibility to correct the situation and make it right.""

‘No fish: How dams and climate change are choking Asia’s great lake

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-01-20/how-climate-change-and-dams-threaten-one-of-the-worlds-great-lakes>

"For more than half a century, January meant prime fishing season for Pang Bin. He took his wooden boat out into Cambodia's largest lake, his catches and their sales sustaining his family for much of the year. This month, the 75-year-old decided to call it quits, but not because of age or any health concerns.

“No fish, he shrugged. “Just very, very poor. I've never seen a year like this. Across the Tonle Sap, a vast shallow lake in the heart of this Southeast Asian nation, fishermen are experiencing the least productive season in memory.

Years of dam-building and droughts intensified by climate change have upset one of the world's richest freshwater fisheries, carrying potentially severe consequences for millions who rely on the lake for survival.

Fishermen say they are capturing only 10% to 20% of their usual haul, and that the catches are smaller than in past years. Upstream, the waterways that feed the lake recently turned from their familiar caramel hue rich with nutrients that sustain hundreds of species to an unsettlingly clear aquamarine due to what experts called “extremely low flows.

Normally, at the start of the year, the banks of the lake are piled high with thousands of tons of silvery, finger-length mud carp, which are mixed with salt to make prahok, a pungent, fermented paste that is an important source of protein in the Cambodian diet.

By some estimates, three-quarters of the protein that Cambodia's 16 million people eat comes from the lake. But the catches were drying up by mid-January, weeks earlier than usual. The price of prahok in nearby markets has doubled to about \$3 per pound.

That is a substantial increase in a country where the average household has about \$200 a month to spend on food, according to official statistics, leaving some families to fret about how they will afford a staple traditionally found in every Cambodian kitchen.

“It's unlikely that there's a protein replacement available for people, or that they have the cash to buy that protein, said Brian Eyler, Southeast Asia program director at the Stimson Center in Washington. “That will have all sorts of knock-on effects and will translate into various human development challenges.

The struggles of the Tonle Sap lake, or “great lake, reflect a broader crisis in the Mekong River system, the lifeline of Southeast Asia. The Mekong, which feeds the lake via a tributary called the Tonle Sap river, courses 2,700 miles from China's Tibetan plateau down through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, where it waters a vast, rice-growing delta before emptying into the South China Sea. The Mekong basin produces 2.6 million tons of freshwater fish annually and supplies food and livelihoods for an estimated 60 million people.

Mekong communities struggle as China tests dam equipment

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/mekong-communities-struggle-china-tests-dam-equipment-200110053233331.html>

"Water levels on the Mekong River, which flows through China and five other countries before emptying into the South China Sea, have dropped once again after Beijing revealed it was testing equipment at one of its 11 dams in the upper reaches of the vital waterway.

The Mekong River Commission (MRC), an inter-governmental body made up of representatives from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, said on December 31 that China would be testing its equipment, warning of a potential 50 percent drop in water outflows.

According to the MRC's forecast, water levels could fall by as much as 70 centimetres in Thailand between January 6 and January 10, and up to 25 centimetres in Cambodia between January 12 and 14. In Thailand, the lack of water has had severe consequences, said Pianporn Deetes, Thailand campaign coordinator for international rivers. "

"In Chiang Khong, northern Thailand bordering Laos during the first week of this year, locals witnessed sudden water fluctuation; water in the Mekong increased then sharply dropped within a couple of days,"" she told Al Jazeera in an email. "

"I was there [on Tuesday] and found that some local farmers lost their crops due to non-seasonal water fluctuation." Not only crops were affected, she said. ""Riverbank erosion is also severe. The water fluctuation also affected migratory fish that depend on the seasonal flood-drought circle of the river. Less fish, less or no income for fisherfolks. They told me this kind of damage has been 'more of the same'."

"The Mekong is the world's 12th-longest river, stretching 4,350 kilometres (2,703 miles) from China in the north to Vietnam in the south. Despite the worrying fluctuations and its impact on the river, experts said they were encouraged that China - for the first time - made its plan known beforehand, extending the hope of better coordination over the Mekong with countries downstream.

Mekong water level in northeastern Thailand drops to one meter

<https://www.chiangraitimes.com/thailand-national-news/northern-thailand/mekong-water-level-in-northeastern-thailand-drop-to-one-meter/>

"Water levels on the Mekong River have dropped to about one meter in Thailand's northeastern province of Nakhon Phanom. The rivers drop comes as the worst drought in 50 years continues to hit north and northeastern Thailand. Irrigation officials said Mekong river levels decreased not only because low rain volumes but also low water discharge by dams in China.

Sand bars are now emerging on the river, affecting ferry service and fishing boats. Hardest-hit are the farmers who rely on water from the international river. Water works service in the province also faces water shortage, TNA reports.

As dry season lasts until May and local officials fear worsened situations. Officials assessed the irrigation system with also plans to launch river dredging operations and other long-term solutions.

In the northeastern province, Nakhon Ratchasima, water in Huay Bon reservoir, which is a major water source, has receded to 10 percent of its holding capacity. The remaining muddy water was almost useless for household consumption, said one of the villagers.

The 60-year-old woman said she had never seen the reservoir so empty. Saying the drought was the worst she had seen in 15 years.