

TUNA RFMOs & THEIR ROLE IN PROTECTING WORKER RIGHTS

RFMO Actionable Asks & Market Action

The presence of labor rights abuses across global tuna fisheries, including situations as severe as human trafficking, forced labor, and death at sea, have justifiably become a more prominent – and long overdue – focus of governments, regulatory bodies, NGOs, businesses, and other concerned stakeholders.

Since many worker rights and safety violations happen on the high seas, beyond any one government's jurisdiction, it is RFMOs that are uniquely positioned to address and manage them.

Further, RFMOs' adoption of worker rights measures can assist member states in progressing their own national regulations.

Therefore, leading environmental and labor rights-focused NGOs have developed a series of measures that tuna RFMOs can take to ensure the rights and safety of all workers are effectively addressed, mitigated and, where necessary, remediated across their jurisdictions.

RFMO Actionable Asks & Market Action (continued)

RFMOs Actions	Why It's Important	Additional Information
Adopt and implement worker rights and safety measures across the RFMO area of jurisdiction.	Fisheries cannot be considered sustainable when violations of worker rights and inadequate safety measures are present. RFMOs have a critical role to play in ensuring that all workers' rights and safety are protected.	
Adopted measures should include minimum protections for worker rights and safety measures in line with all applicable laws, relevant ILO Conventions and the UN and FAO guidance for worker rights in global fisheries.	Providing minimum standards consistent with international conventions provide consistent, clear, ground rules for all vessels in an RFMO jurisdiction.	Among specific protections set forth in various conventions and guidance: • No forced labor • No child labor • Fair and ethical recruitment • Safe working conditions • Non-discrimination • Freedom of association and collective bargaining • Access to communication at sea* • Access to effective grievance mechanisms • Adequate rest • Repatriation • Adequate food, water, and living conditions • Worker training on their rights
Worker rights and safety measures adopted should incorporate effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and a requirement that parties act (remediate) on any notified human and labor rights abuses (e.g., remediation).	Minimum standards are valuable only when monitoring in place to determine if the standards are being met. Otherwise, standards will have limited effect at best. Remediation: the goal should be to "fix what's found." This helps to ensure improvements are made.	
Adopt necessary data collection standards and compliance tools to ensure compliance with RFMO measures.	Clear standards for consistent collection of necessary data and appropriate compliance tools "close the loop" in ensuring effectiveness of the standards.	Worker engagement and input is essential to effectively verify compliance and effectiveness.

* During non-work hours & and no cost to them. This can be cell service where available or vessel-based WIFI.

The Role of the Supply Chain

Labor abuses – including trafficking, forced labor, and death at sea – remain widespread in global tuna fisheries and must be addressed urgently. For companies involved in tuna harvesting, processing, and sales, tackling these issues is both a legal duty and a moral imperative. Doing so protects workers, reduces harm, and helps avoid legal and reputational risk.

What Tuna Supply Chain Companies Can Do

1. Companies should implement a human rights due diligence (HRDD) process that is inclusive of elements highlighted in relevant ILO conventions, and the UN and FAO guidance for worker rights in global fisheries.
2. As part of a HRDD program, companies must put in place prevention and monitoring efforts with time-bound commitments, and communicate these efforts internally and externally.
3. When labor abuses are discovered in a supply chain, undertake remediation efforts in consultation with workers, with time-bound commitments and public report outcomes.
4. Companies should use their individual and collective voices to advocate for National Governments and RFMOs to adopt and implement worker rights and safety measures.

Why It's Important

- Human rights are important in and of themselves, so it is the right thing to do
- In line with UNGP
- Compliance with legislation and regulation in different territories
- Makes for good business sense as it is the key tool to reduce risks of abuses and hence the reputational damage that comes with it
- Inherent in the implementation of an HRDD process is the adequate assessment and remediation of risk

Resources

To support companies in addressing labor rights, we provide the following resources that can be used to develop and implement human rights due diligence processes: ngotunaforum.org/worker-rights-resources
