



Ending illegal fishing and forced labour in seafood production

February 2026

“Let everyone regulate his conduct... by the golden rule of doing to others as in similar circumstances we would have them do to us, and the path of duty will be clear before him.”
Christian English anti-slavery activist William Wilberforce

Forced labour remains a significant global problem. It persists in the seafood industry, particularly on some fishing vessels that catch seafood for importation into Australia.

There is also a problem with Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) seafood production. IUU fishing is a crucial contributor to global overfishing. It threatens marine ecosystems, puts food security and regional stability at risk, and is linked to human rights violations and organised crime. It can harm stocks of endangered species and threaten biodiversity. IUU fishing threatens local economies in the countries where it occurs and contributes to food insecurity in places where fish is a crucial source of income and a food staple. IUU fishing has also been associated with tax evasion, drug trafficking, arms trafficking on the same vessels and money laundering.

In the 2023-2024 financial year, Australia imported 215,000 tonnes of edible seafood valued at \$2.3 billion.

The Synod Justice and International Mission Cluster provided funding to Greenpeace Indonesia towards a larger investigation they were conducting into the use of forced labour on tuna fishing boats operating from Indonesia and the involvement of these boats in IUU. Greenpeace Indonesia interviewed 42 crew members from fishing boats. They identified that 19 crew members worked on 13 vessels that supplied five Indonesian companies that export tuna to Australia. All of the crew interviewed reported being exploited, with 92% having their vulnerability abused, 77% were in the forced labour situation of debt bondage, and 69% had been deceived about the working conditions they would be subjected to.

Most of the crew on fishing boats are recruited by brokers who operate illegally under Indonesian law. The brokers get paid for each crew member they deliver to the boats. Crew members end up in debt bondage by accepting a loan (up to \$550) that provides money they can give to their families. The debt is then compounded as recruitment fees, transportation, accommodation, and other expenses are added to it, often illegally, while the crew member waits at the port to join the fishing boat. Crew members are not informed of the extra charges being added to their debt.

Crew on four of the fishing boats reported working excessive hours, resulting in sleep deprivation, working up to 21 hours a day. One crew member reported the boat captain stabbed him with a fish bone because he told the other crew they could sleep after working 24 hours straight. The wound did not receive stitches.

The crew are cheated out of their pay. On some boats, the crew are supposed to get a share of the profits from a fishing trip. Fishing trips can last up to 18 months on some vessels. The split of the profits is often 50% to the vessel owner, 25% to the captain and 25% split among the crew. The crew are unable to access information on how much the boat has caught on the trip or how much it has been sold for. Thus, the crew have no idea how much they should be paid for the trip. If a trip is unprofitable, the crew may receive no pay for that trip.

On other vessels, crew are paid a set wage, which is the legal minimum wage of \$294 a month. However, all the crew members interviewed on these vessels were in debt bondage. Deductions were made from their wages to pay off the debt incurred before they had boarded the vessel.

The Commonwealth Government has so far rejected the need to take any measures to address forced labour in seafood production.

Instead, the Government announced on 11 November 2025 that it would:

- A review of the codes that seafood importers use and related data reporting requirements to allow for a more comprehensive classification of Australia's seafood imports. However, the proposed measure is only a review, which may result in no change.
- Continue to collaborate on catch documentation schemes with other governments. A catch documentation scheme is a system that tracks and traces fish from the point of capture through unloading and throughout the supply chain. Such a scheme records and certifies information identifying the origin of fish caught and ensures they were harvested in accordance with relevant national, regional, and international conservation and management measures. The catch documentation scheme aims to combat IUU fishing by limiting access of IUU fish and fishery products to markets.

However, these measures will not necessarily prevent an importer from supplying illegally sourced seafood into the Australian market unless backed up by further requirements on the importer or action by an Australian law enforcement agency.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP
Attorney-General
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister



Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern that seafood entering Australia has been produced with forced labour.
- A recent investigation has found strong evidence of forced labour being used on fishing boats operating from Indonesia that are supplying tuna into Australia.
- Urge the Australian Government to:
 - Take necessary actions to allow importation data from the Australian Government's Integrated Cargo System (ICS) to be publicly accessible, helping to identify Australian importers sourcing from businesses overseas involved in forced labour.
 - Introduce and pass legislation to include forced labour in the definition of IUU fishing in Australian law, to ensure that seafood produced with the involvement of forced labour is subject to the same sanctions and restrictions as other IUU seafood.
 - Introduce, pass and implement legislation making it illegal for businesses to import seafood produced with forced labour, including instituting a forced labour import ban. The Australian Border Force should be empowered to seize goods before they enter Australia when there is strong evidence that the goods were produced through forced labour.
 - Pass laws to require seafood importers to check that the products they are importing are not produced with forced labour or IUU fishing. Such a requirement should be modelled on the existing *Illegal Logging Prohibition Act*.