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SWW RAC'S OPINION ON THE FUTURE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE EU AND THAILAND.

On 27 May negotiations began to obtain a free trade agreement between the European Union and Thailand, a member of the ASEAN organisation.

SWW RAC, South West Water Regional Advisory Council, **wishes to express its deep concern regarding the organisation of these negotiations and their impact on the sector that it represents.**

These negotiations are particularly sensitive for the fishing and processing sector in the European Union, since **Thailand, one of the world's major producers and exporters of fish and seafood, particularly of tuna, has become one of the main competitors of the EU fishing sector.** Moreover, given the working conditions to which the workers onboard Thai fishing vessels are subjected and the importance of the phenomenon of human trafficking in this region¹, and in order to avoid any social dumping harmful to the European fishing industry, these negotiations must also focus on the necessity for the two parties to give undertakings on minimum standards (safety and technical standards) in the field of work, in accordance with the related international social and environmental standards²³.

SWW RAC's members represent a fishing and processing industry located in the coastal and outermost areas, which are highly dependent on this industry. Therefore, any liberalisation of the customs arrangements for fishing and aquaculture products from Thailand, particularly for canned tuna, could have serious economic, social and employment repercussions in these areas of the European Union and also for the European canning industry which represents approximately 120,300 direct jobs, mostly occupied by women and whose production amounts to almost 3,883.7 million euros.

For the reasons mentioned above, **SWW RAC proposes that, in the context of the negotiations to find a free trade agreement between the European Union and Thailand the fragility of this sector should be taken into account, particularly the canning industry, in view**

¹ See Report *Sold To the Sea - Human Trafficking in Thailand's Fishing Industry* by the Environmental Justice Foundation (2013)

² FAO. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rome, FAO. 1995. 41 p

³ IMO Protocol of Torremolinos relating to the international agreement of Torremolinos on safety of fishing vessels 1977 and the CapeTown agreement on the safety of fishing boats (2012);

- IMO STCW-F Convention concerning the abilities of shipping vessel crew member;

- ILO Work in Fishing Convention C188 (which is reproduced in the Social Partners Agreement of May 2012).





of the extreme differences in requirements between industry in the European Union and in Thailand, especially concerning employment policy, and the conditions and costs of production, so that the negotiations do not result in any concessions on the fishing products and processing, above all on canned tuna, so as to avoid serious economic, social and employment damage in the coastal and outermost areas of the European Union, where most of its fishing and processing industry is located.

The members of the SWW RAC also consider that the EU should raise the question of human trafficking within the Thai fishing sector during these negotiations, in order to actively fight against this phenomenon but also to avoid unfair competition to the detriment of the European fishing sector. This question should be addressed by a real commitment, in the context of these negotiations, from the Thai government to put in place the necessary procedures to ensure the respect of human rights and employment law in the fishing sector.

Finally, the members of the SWW RAC would like to point out that in order to ensure equality of treatment and in compliance with the partnership agreements in the fishing domain signed previously with other countries, the social clause negotiated by the European social partners (or a similar text concerning the respect of certain international standards on the subject of labour law) should be included in the free trade agreement between the EU and Thailand.

Consequently, the members of the SWW RAC invite the EU to support the introduction of conditionality mechanisms that make it possible to include in the agreement the respect of decent working conditions as defined by the ILO in order to ensure fishing products obtained through trafficking and abusive working conditions cannot enter the Union's territory.

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