



OPRT

CIEL BLUE Koji-machi (4F)
3-4-3 Koji-machi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0083
Tel: 03-6256-9138; Fax: 03-6256-9139
Website: <http://www.oprt.or.jp>

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FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

OPRT adopted a resolution on labor issues at its General Meeting on June 21

1. Background

In recent years, labor issues onboard fishing vessels have been attracting increasing attention, and there has been much media coverage and many reports published. For example, Greenpeace published two reports on forced labor and/or improper employment from 2020 to 2021. Submission of papers on this issue to academic journals has also been seen. More recently, there was one piece of media coverage on the claim of environmental NGOs that fishery products such as tunas caught by OPRT Member's fishing vessels, where violation of human rights are prevalent, have been imported to the Japanese market. This report attracted great attention among people in Japan.

Attention should also be given to the fact that the forced labor issue is frequently linked with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. A joint working group between FAO and IMO was established in 2000 to tackle IUU fisheries, which was joined also by ILO in 2019 to discuss labor issues in fisheries. The United States submitted a proposal to the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation in May 2021, in which it claims that elimination of subsidies to IUU fishing will contribute to solving the forced labor issue.

The distant-water tuna long line fishery is regarded as one of the fisheries susceptible to forced labor. Treatment of this issue in the wrong manner may lead to the boycotting of products caught by distant-water tuna long line vessels. In fact, Mitsubishi Corporation and its group company Toyo Reizo issued the Bluefin Tuna Sustainable Sourcing Policy in July 2021 whereby they avoid sourcing bluefin tuna (Atlantic bluefin tuna, Pacific bluefin tuna and Southern bluefin tuna) produced in ways that contribute to the violation of human rights and/or labor rights, through the implementation of targeted and effective due diligence measures.

The WCPFC has been discussing this labor issue. ICCAT also started discussing it from this year and held a working group meeting on labor

standards in March.

As the organization for promoting responsible tuna fisheries, the OPRT should itself properly address the labor issue in the long line fishery, separately from the discussion at the WCPFC and ICCAT.

2. Holding of a workshop

To foster common understanding of the current situation, as well as to exchange information among OPRT Members and discuss actions to be taken by the OPRT and its Member vessels, the OPRT organized a two-day workshop on March 7 and 8. It was held in a hybrid style and attended by OPRT Members and supporting Members, as well as officials from the OPRT Member countries.

The workshop was kicked off with opening remarks by Mr. Yuji Uozumi, the President of the OPRT, followed by a keynote presentation on labor issues in fishing by Mr. Shingo Ota, OPRT Managing Director, as well as reports from members of industry. After the discussion, the workshop agreed that the OPRT should work towards adoption of a resolution on labor issues at the General Meeting in June 2022, which will be used to demonstrate to the world the intention of the OPRT Members to tackle this issue.

3. Adoption of a resolution

The Secretariat first circulated a check sheet in which each Member was requested to indicate what had been done so far and what could be done in the future to address labor issues on board fishing vessels. The Secretariat compiled responses from the Members and produced a draft resolution based on the responses and the discussion at the workshop. The resolution was formally adopted at the OPRT General Meeting on June 21, 2022. (See below.) After the adoption, the Secretariat sent it to the IATTC, IOTC, ICCAT, and WCPFC for their perusal.

OPRT Resolution to address labor issues on board tuna long-line fishing vessels

The Organization for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna Fisheries (OPRT), whose members are involved in production, distribution, and consumption of sashimi tuna in the world,

Affirming that the OPRT has conducted its business over a couple of decades with the objective of contributing to the sustainable development of tuna fisheries in compliance with international and social responsibility and the stable supply of tuna products;

Recognizing that in recent years, labor issues onboard fishing vessels have been attracting an increasing attention and there have been many media coverages and reports published on violation of human rights on board fishing vessels;

Aware that the distant-water tuna long line fishery is regarded as one of the fisheries susceptible to labor issues;

Concerned that major companies are introducing a sustainable and socially responsible sourcing policy for fish products, and irresponsible fish products including those with labor issues may be excluded from the international market;

Recalling that the WCPFC has been discussing the labor issue and ICCAT has also started discussing it, which may be followed by other tuna-RFMOs;

Recognizing that individual OPRT Members have already taken or are taking measures to address the labor issue on board distant-water tuna long line vessels;

Confirming that as the organization for promoting responsible tuna fisheries, the OPRT should properly and collectively address the labor issue in the distant-water tuna long line fishery apart from the discussion at RFMOs, and for this purpose held a workshop for addressing labor issues on March 7 and 8, 2022; and

Recalling that the said workshop agreed that the OPRT should work towards adoption of a resolution on labor issues at the General Meeting in June 2022, which will be used to appeal to the world the intention of the OPRT Members to tackle this issue.

Has resolved as follows at the Ordinary General Meeting held on June 21, 2022:

1. Ensure that both employers and employees have a common understanding of the employment contract and for this purpose the manning company explains the terms and conditions to the crew.
2. Ensure that a safe and secure working environment is provided for crew members.
3. Request the manning company to inquire about the welfare of the crew after disembarkation through direct contact and provide feedback to the employer if necessary.
4. Ensure that good quality and quantity of meals and beverages are provided to crew members including foreign ones.
5. Ensure that basic medical care available aboard and transportation to a land hospital in case of emergency are provided.
6. Ensure that the employer provides crew members with insurance coverage against illness, injury and death covered.
7. Ensure that the employer pays crew members periodical and proper salary and fees in accordance with the contract.
8. Ensure appropriate handling of and report on onboard conflict and accident.
9. Ensure that the captain or the fishing master reports a death onboard and hospitalization of crew to his family and employer, and especially in case of death, seeks instruction of the authorities for handling the event where necessary.
10. Ensure that the vessel searches for at least 72 hours when a crew member is missing.
11. Request, if possible, the authorities to consider:
 - (1) Intervention and investigation for serious and chronic incidents
 - (2) Interviewing, hearing and querying crew members after disembarkation to know whether there was any inappropriate incident
 - (3) Supervising manning companies which are situated in its territory on their operations for protection of the rights of workers