

## **US Pangasius Imports Spike to All-Time Monthly High in February Ahead of USDA Inspections**

The US imported a record amount of frozen pangasius fillets in February with buyers unsure how the implementation of the USDAs catfish inspection program would impact the market.

The program started on March 1 though overseas suppliers were granted an 18-month grace period to get their facilities under compliance. So far, the bulk of the USs major pangasius suppliers are on the USDAs list of approved operators. There's been a lot of uncertainty surrounding the overall implementation of the program; some of that was seen in a mid-February spike in wholesale prices. However, there are no indications that the USDAs inspection program will impede shipments to the market this year and given the available import data, the US is on track to set another record for imported pangasius volumes in 2016.

The US State Department said Wednesday that forced labor on Thai fishing vessels continued in the past year despite legal reforms and arrests. The department made the assessment in its annual global review of human rights practices, released in Washington by Secretary of State John Kerry. "The lack of clarity in law and practice on what constitutes forced labour or debt bondage undermined the government's efforts to identify labour trafficking victims and prosecute forced labour," the report said.

In other news, NOAA forecasts the record-setting El Nino weather pattern to dissipate by the summer this year. The Administration reported cooling temperatures around the equatorial Pacific over the last several weeks. This year's El Niño became one of the top three strongest on record and also set a new record for peak instantaneous strength.

Finally, the US Customs and Border Patrol is starting to exercise its powers under a revised law that allows it to ban imported goods from the US market if they are suspected of originating from suppliers using forced labor. So far no seafood shipments have been detained, but human rights agencies believe the imported seafood sector will become a target by US Customs agents moving forward.

Source : Seafood News Summary, 14/04/ 2016