

## **OPAGAC calls for EU to scrutinize seafood imports from China**

The Organization of Associated Producers of Large Freezer Tuna Vessels (OPAGAC), a Spain-based association of nine operators of 47 tuna purse-seiners fishing in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans, has called upon the European Union to revise its criteria for allowing seafood imports from China.

The E.U.'s accession Convention 188 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), now in force, requires it to enact regulations to ensure European consumers do not consume fish from boats with slaves on board or from those that do not respect the minimum social conditions or salaries set by the ILO. That is not currently being done, OPAGAC said in a press release.

“Europe cannot continue to turn a blind eye to these facts and import fish from these fleets, including those that are exempt from tariffs, for domestic consumption by E.U. citizens,” OPAGAC Managing Director Julio Morón said in a press release.

Morón pointed to the deaths of four Indonesian crewmembers working onboard the Long Xing 629, a Chinese tuna longliner as justification for an investigation into E.U. procedures. According to the Environmental Justice Foundation and the Advocates for Public Interest Law, the crew was to work 18-hour days, was subject to physical violence, and was forced to partake in illegal fishing. According to the report, the four members who died suffered swelling, chest pains, and breathing difficulties for weeks and were denied medical care. The Indonesian government has opened a criminal investigation into Dalian Ocean Fishing, the holding company for the firm that operates the Long Xing 629 and 31 other tuna boats.

“The Spanish tuna fleet united under OPAGAC believes that the time has come for Europe to open a debate and reflect in depth on the criteria the EU has currently established for fish product imports from Chinese fleets, due to the latest information made public by different NGOs and various



Asian media outlets, on the degrading treatment of their crews, including burials at sea of sailors who, allegedly, fall victim to COVID-19,” OPAGAC said in its release. “OPAGAC reports that these latest events have caused a flood of indignation among the European fleets that operate under strict compliance of the different laws regulating this fishing activity worldwide, with special focus, as in the case of the Spanish fleet, on the strengthening of crews’ social and employment rights.”

The health crisis triggered by COVID-19 and its impact on the safety and well-being of international crews on board tuna-fishing vessels worldwide “has highlighted the situation of the sailors in the Chinese fleet, as they are often abandoned to their fate on board the vessels,” it said.

“In contrast, European tuna fleets have made a great effort to overcome innumerable obstacles and relieve our crews safely, as is the case with the Spanish fleet that, on 9 May, managed to transfer 189 crewmen to the Seychelles and repatriate another 184,” Morón said. “Europe cannot be indifferent to the discrimination it practices, in this case against its own fleets with the Chinese, and also with a product that is consumed by almost all European citizens.”

The E.U. has sharply increased its imports of tuna caught by Chinese and Southeast Asian fleets, from 5 percent of total tuna consumption in the bloc in 2012 to 53 percent in 2019, amounting to 79,500 MT of tuna.

“In the opinion of OPAGAC, the comparative disadvantage for [Spanish] production, which complies with all legal requirements, is enormous,” it said.

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