Regional Workshop on Introducing Decent Working Condition in the Fisheries Sector

Regional Plan of Action (RPOA) to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Region

15 -16 September 2026

Summary Report

General Overview

The Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating IUU Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU), in collaboration with International Labour Organization organized the Introducing Decent Working Conditions in the Fisheries Sector held on 15 to 16 September 2026 in hybrid format, with in-person participation at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, Indonesia, and online participation via Zoom. The meeting was attended by representatives from workers' organizations, including Associated Philippine Seafarers Union (APSU Philippines), Serikat Awak Kapal Perikanan Bersatu Sulut (SAKTI), Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI), Kesatuan Pelaut Indonesia (KPI), and Serikat Pekerja Perikanan Indonesia (SPPI), as well as the employers' organization, Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia (APINDO). Five of eleven countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and The Philippines) attended the discussion and shared their respective experiences and best practices in promoting and implementing decent working conditions in the fisheries sector.

The Regional Workshop on Introducing Decent Working Condition in the Fisheries Sector aims to (i) analyse the link between IUU fishing and labour issues, (ii) enhance understanding of the principles of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) (C188), and explore practical strategies for implementing decent working conditions in the fisheries sector; and iii) discuss strategies to promote decent working conditions at national and regional levels.

Opening Remarks

Ms. Simrin Singh, the ILO Country Director for Indonesia and Timor-Leste, welcomed the partnership with RPOA-IUU and highlighted the importance of integrating decent work for fishers into responsible fisheries management. She emphasised that addressing abuse and exploitation of fishers is essential to achieving sustainable fisheries, noting that the regional workshop provides an opportunity to address both IUU fishing and the need for safe and decent working and living conditions for fishers.

Ms. Saiti Gusrini, Programme Manager for Human Rights, Democracy, Gender and Migration at the European Union, highlighted that the EU IUU Regulation uses access to the European market as an important tool to combat IUU fishing. She emphasised that, beyond ensuring the legality of fisheries products, decent working conditions should also be considered as an important aspect of responsible and sustainable fisheries. She also expressed the EU's support for and appreciation of the workshop and its efforts to promote decent working conditions in the fisheries sector.

Mr. Saiful Umam, the Executive Director of the RPOA-IUU Secretariat, highlighted that responsible fisheries are not only about sustainably managing fish stocks, but also about recognising the social aspects of ecosystem-based fisheries management. He emphasised that States have the mandate and responsibility to ensure that fisheries activities provide safe, healthy, and fair working and living conditions, in line with internationally agreed standards.

Overview of the meeting

The RPOA-IUU Secretariat presented the objectives and expected outputs of the Regional Workshop on Introducing Decent Working Conditions in the Fisheries Sector. The workshop included presentations on the linkage between IUU fishing and labour issues, an overview of relevant international frameworks including ILO C188, country sharing on the implementation of decent working conditions, and group discussions on strategies to promote decent working conditions at the national and regional levels.

Session 1. The linkage between IUU fishing and labour issues

Mr. Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative for Indonesia and Timor Leste , presented on the linkage between IUU fishing and labour issues, highlighting how decent working conditions can strengthen regulatory compliance. He explained that IUU fishing and labour violations are distinct issues but may be driven by common weaknesses in governance, oversight, transparency, and accountability. He also highlighted the vulnerability of the fisheries sector due to long periods at sea, limited communication, fear of reprisal, and complex jurisdictional arrangements.

He further outlined how clear employment records, safe working and living standards, fair recruitment, and effective worker communication can improve transparency, accountability, and compliance. He also highlighted the complementary roles of the FAO Port State Measures Agreement, ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), and IMO Cape Town Agreement in supporting port controls, inspections, and enforcement.

He encouraged countries to strengthen inter-agency coordination, port inspections, information-sharing and joint enforcement, as well as national implementation of relevant international instruments.

Session 2. An overview of the international and regional frameworks relevant to the promotion of decent working conditions in fisheries sectors

Mr. Albert Bonasahat from ILO presented the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), which establishes international minimum standards for decent working and living conditions on fishing vessels. He highlighted that the Convention covers areas including minimum requirements for work, conditions of service, accommodation and food, occupational safety and health, medical care, and social security. He also explained the importance of C188 in addressing the specific risks and challenges faced by fishers, particularly the hazardous and isolated nature of fishing work and the complex cross-border jurisdictions involved.

Mr. Matthew McGregor and Dr. Penelope Ridings, representing the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), presented CMM 2024-04 on crew labour standards for fishing vessels. They highlighted that the measure is the first binding regional standard on crew welfare and is based on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C188), covering safe working conditions, protection from forced labour and mistreatment, written employment contracts, decent working and living conditions, remuneration, and access to disembarkation. CMM 2024-04 will enter into force on 1 January 2028 and applies to WCPFC Members, Cooperating Non-Members and Participating Territories (CCMs) in relevant fishing areas.

Representatives from the Philippines' Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and Indonesia's Ministry of Manpower presented recent developments on labour issues in the fisheries sector. The Philippines shared its experience in translating international commitments into national

policies and programs, including labour inspection, occupational safety and health, social protection, tripartite engagement, and regional initiatives to promote decent working conditions. DOLE_ From Frameworks to Action.

Ministry of Manpower Indonesia highlighted its efforts following the ratification of ILO C188, including strengthening labour protection, social security, occupational safety and health, and regulatory coordination among relevant ministries. Indonesia also shared its joint inspection initiative involving labour, maritime, and fisheries inspectors as a practical approach to strengthening supervision and compliance in the fisheries sector.

Several themes emerged during the discussion:

a. Indonesia is undertaking adjustments following its recent ratification of ILO C188, including the development of joint inspection mechanisms involving relevant authorities and the dissemination of information on wage-related provisions to strengthen awareness and compliance in the fisheries sector.
b. Indonesia is receiving technical support from the ILO in the implementation of ILO C188, including support for relevant policies, coordination, and practical implementation measures at the national level.

Session 3. Sharing session on current status of fisheries working rights and labour, including its challenges and interventions to address and fill the gaps

Mr. Benjamin Harkins, representing the International Labour Organization (ILO), presented the "Towards Fair Seas" regional study on the recruitment and working conditions of migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in South-East Asia. He highlighted key findings on recruitment costs, excessive working hours, wage-related abuses, occupational injuries, and forced labour among migrant workers. The study found significant vulnerabilities associated with long periods at sea, recruitment practices, limited access to assistance, and unclear jurisdictions. He also highlighted recommendations to strengthen worker-centred approaches, labour inspections, wage protection, implementation of relevant ILO conventions, workers' organizations, and gender-responsive measures in the fisheries sector.

Mr. Yudhistira Rizky Abdillah, Vice Executive Director of the RPOA-IUU Secretariat, presented an overview of the regional landscape on promoting decent working conditions within the RPOA-IUU framework. He highlighted the existing international and regional instruments relevant to decent working conditions, including ILO C188, as well as the growing recognition of labour standards within RFMO frameworks. He underscored the global development of trade measures, extending beyond sustainable fisheries and the eradication of IUU fishing to encompass labour rights, particularly the elimination of forced labour and the assurance of decent working conditions within the fisheries sector. He also noted key challenges, including the complex and multisectoral nature of labour regulation, the different mandates of fisheries and labour authorities, and the need to further integrate decent working conditions into responsible fisheries management.

Mr. Hariyanto from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Trade Union (SBMI) presented case studies illustrating the interconnection between IUU fishing, forced labour, and human trafficking. He highlighted recruitment-related vulnerabilities, including excessive fees, debt bondage, document retention, non-standard employment contracts, and weak oversight. SBMI also shared cases of Indonesian migrant fishers experiencing unpaid wages, poor working conditions, and trafficking-related exploitation.

Ms. Mi Zhou from the ILO Ship to Shore Rights SEA presented approaches to inter-agency coordination for promoting safety and decent working conditions in the fisheries sector. She highlighted the importance of clear roles and coordination among relevant authorities, joint inspections, information sharing, and cross-border cooperation to strengthen enforcement and protection of fishers.

Mr. Isala, Labour Standards Advisor of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), presented the FFA's strategy for integrating international labour standards into the regional fisheries framework. He highlighted the use of Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions and WCPFC labour standards, supported by national implementation, capacity building, monitoring, and partnerships to improve working conditions for fishers.

Several themes emerged during the discussion:

a. KPI inquired about the RPOA-IUU's programme on marine pollution, and the RPOA-IUU Secretariat explained that, particularly under the Arafura and Timor Seas MCS Sub-Regional Group, the work plan includes a focus on Abandoned, Lost, or Otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG). During surveillance operations, any ALDFG encountered is required to be secured and removed.
b. In addition to inter-agency coordination, clear legal frameworks and mandates are important to ensure that each relevant agency understands its roles and responsibilities, allowing mechanisms such as joint inspections to be implemented effectively and contributing to the promotion of decent working conditions.

Session 4. Group Discussion on overview of national efforts in implementing decent working conditions national efforts in implementing decent working conditions

Mr. Preecha Phothong from the Department of Fisheries, Thailand, presented Thailand's national efforts to promote decent working conditions in the fisheries sector. They highlighted the Thai-MECC coordination mechanism, multidisciplinary port inspections, worker traceability through the Seabook system, and risk-based inspections integrating fisheries and labour compliance.

Mr. Halimi bin Abu Hanip from the Department of Fisheries Malaysia presented Malaysia's national efforts to promote decent working conditions in the capture fisheries sector. They highlighted measures on migrant fisher recruitment, worker protection, safety standards, living and working conditions, and integrated vessel and labour inspections.

Mr. Uy Ching, Deputy Director General of the General Directorate of Fisheries, presented Cambodia's national efforts to promote decent working conditions in the fisheries sector. He highlighted inter-ministerial coordination, strengthened port and coastal inspections, migrant worker protection, and strategies to integrate labour standards into IUU fishing controls and joint inspections.

Mr. Mijil Ritno Sujiwo, representing the Directorate General of Capture Fisheries, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of Indonesia, presented Indonesia's efforts to protect fishing vessel personnel. He highlighted joint labour inspections, inter-agency coordination, improved recruitment and placement governance, grievance mechanisms, and the use of digital crew data to strengthen worker protection and decent working conditions.

Ms. Pauline Hombhanje, a representative from Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (NFA) presented PNG's national efforts to promote decent working conditions in the fisheries sector. He highlighted challenges in labour inspection and inter-agency coordination, as well as initiatives such as the FISH Crew Certification, Responsible Sourcing Policy, vessel inspections, and participation in regional labour standards initiatives.

Representatives from Brunei Darussalam presented the country's national efforts to promote decent working conditions in the fisheries sector, highlighting the existing legal framework, safety and medical requirements, employment contracts, and complaint mechanisms. They also noted challenges related to fisheries-specific labour regulations, onboard inspections, and inter-agency coordination.

Several themes emerged during the discussion:

a. Thailand shared its experience in implementing ILO C188, as the first country in the region to ratify the Convention.
b. Thailand has established national regulations aligned with ILO C188, including provisions on wage payment to crew members.
c. Thailand also highlighted its multidisciplinary joint inspection mechanism, involving several relevant agencies to strengthen compliance with fisheries and labour requirements.

Session 5. Plenary Reporting and National Action Planning

In this session, participants applied the lessons of the two-day workshop to a case-study exercise. Four groups each analysed a case on the links between illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and labour issues, including forced labour and human trafficking. The case studies, prepared by the Secretariat of the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), are included in the **Annex**.

The exercise had two stages. Each group first discussed its case among its members, then presented its findings in plenary through a speaker. The ILO facilitator then invited each group to elaborate on its answers and consider other relevant elements, so that the analysis was tested and deepened collectively. The findings and the outcome of the plenary discussion were as follows:

a. **Group 1** identified several violations and the relevant instruments, including the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing (PSMA) and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). It also cited the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). When the facilitator asked whether SOLAS applies to fishing, the group concluded that the IMO Cape Town Agreement of 2012 is the applicable instrument for fishing vessel safety.
b. **Group 2** highlighted situations in which crew members experienced pressure and distress. In the plenary discussion, it proposed that crew members be interviewed separately during inspections, giving them a safe space to speak freely.
c. **Group 3** emphasised inter-agency cooperation, as the case involved forced labour, human trafficking and transhipment-related violations falling under the mandates of different authorities.
d. **Group 4** examined the legal basis for action, including breaches of employment contracts under Convention No. 188 and the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and highlighted vessel owners' failure to ensure decent working conditions on board.

Overall, the exercise underlined the need to identify the correct instrument for each violation, the value of inspections that allow crew to speak safely, and the necessity of inter-agency coordination. The plenary review proved essential, prompting groups to refine or correct their initial analysis.

Session 6. RPOA-IUU-led discussion on regional action/key takeaways

During this session, participating countries actively shared their recommendations for the RPOA-IUU moving forward. At the regional level, recommendations included strengthening the integration of decent working conditions into relevant RPOA-IUU work plans and activities, promoting

regional information and experience sharing on labour-related risks, strengthening cooperation with the ILO and other relevant partners, and developing targeted regional capacity-building activities. At the national level, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening inter-agency coordination, implementing relevant legislation in line with international labour standards, considering ratification of ILO C188, and enhancing the capacity of inspectors, enforcement officers, vessel operators, and workers' organisations.

The discussion also identified several ways forward, including exploring the integration of decent working conditions into the RPOA-IUU framework and future activities, identifying priority areas for regional cooperation and capacity building, continuing technical cooperation with the ILO, facilitating the sharing of national experiences and best practices, and maintaining engagement with regional and international partners for concrete follow-up actions.

Session 7. Closing remarks

Closing from the RPOA-IUU Secretariat and ILO

Annex.









During Session 5, participants engaged in a group activity to analyse case studies related to decent working conditions in the fisheries sector. Participants discussed the cases in groups, exchanged views and experiences, and applied the knowledge gained from the previous sessions to identify key issues and possible approaches to addressing decent working conditions in the fisheries sector.