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**INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
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Europe's first Worker-Driven Social Responsibility Pilot Launched to Fight Worker Exploitation at Sea

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and the Fair Food Programme (FFP) announce next steps for ground-breaking new worker-driven programme for UK fishing.

The new Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) programme for UK fishing is an ambitious project that is the first of its kind in Europe. Having completed an intensive twelve-month planning phase, the programme has now launched as a two-year pilot to build worker-driven, market-enforced mechanisms and systems to improve working conditions and tackle concerns of labour abuse in the UK fishing industry.

Lucila Granada, CEO at Focus on Labour Exploitation said:

"FLEX is delighted to be launching Europe's first ever Worker-driven Social Responsibility programme jointly with ITF and the Fair Food Programme. WSR truly is a ground-breaking model, and we are excited to be bringing it to the UK to help restructure the power imbalances that exist in the fishing industry between worker and employer, and in particular safeguard and improve working conditions for migrant fishers who are a vital part of the UK's fishing industry."

WSR is an exciting model for tackling labour abuse and exploitation in corporate supply chains, with more than a decade of proven results in industries ranging from agriculture to textiles. The model is designed to address the power imbalances that exist between workers and employers, as well as between buyers and suppliers, imbalances that drive many of the abuses found at the base of global supply chains today.

The new UK WSR fishing pilot programme will build upon learnings and examples from existing WSR programmes across the world, such as the Fair Food Programme, launched in the US in 2011 by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Bangladesh Accord launched in 2013. In the UK fishing context, the WSR programme will work closely with the Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA) and other industry partners, and seek to address concerns such as those caused by the immigration 'loophole' of the seafarer's 'transit-visa', which means migrant fishers are not protected by UK employment laws when working on UK vessels just outside of the twelve nautical mile legal limit.

Chris Williams, ITF fisheries expert said:

“ITF have campaigned to shut the transit visa loophole and been successful – the Home Office have admitted (in 2023) that transit visas used for crew fishing in UK territorial waters are an illegal route to employment, as we have argued for many years. The change to skilled worker visas is a positive and necessary step, but this does not cover vessels fishing outside UKTTW. This pilot project gives migrant fishers working on some of these vessels a chance for greater protection and improved conditions at work, as well as the ability to shape their own working conditions, despite the continued use of seafarer’s transit visa to recruit them. We hope this pilot will be successful and expand over time to ensure all workers, regardless of their nationality or immigration status, are paid fairly and treated with respect for the difficult work they do.”

The UK pilot programme will be launched in North East Scotland, delivered by FLEX in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and in consultation with ITF, the Fair Food Standards Council and Dr. Jess Sparks, Assistant Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. The project will involve collaboration among several key stakeholders including the Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA), the retailers SEA Alliance, human rights experts, and local community organisations.

Dr Jess Sparks, Assistant Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University said:

“For too long, the global fishing industry has relied on voluntary standards and initiatives that demonstrably cause further harm to workers. WSR has more than 10 years of evidence supporting its effectiveness in eliminating all forms of labour exploitation, and I’m excited to see UK fisheries be world leading in implementing the first WSR program in fishing.”

Mike Park OBE, Chief Executive of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association Limited said:

“It is important that the welfare and well-being of all crew operating on UK fishing vessels is protected to the highest standards possible, that is why we are excited by the potential this initiative delivers. Having visited the Fair Food Programme and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in their place of operation in the tomato fields of Florida, I have great hope that we can replicate the same supporting network here in the UK for all fishermen and fisherwomen.”

The pilot has secured funding from Humanity United to run for an initial two-year period starting from December 2023. It will be implemented in the North East of Scotland region, and begin with outreach work with migrant fishers and active engagement with key industry stakeholders in two key ports.

Julia Black, Chair of the Seafood Ethics Action Alliance & Group Ethics & Social Sustainability Senior Manager at Hilton Foods said:

“The development of a worker-driven social responsibility pilot within a UK fishery is an exciting marker for our industry. As a pre-competitive collaboration of UK retailers and seafood businesses, we work to ensure respect for human rights our global seafood supply chains. We are interested to see this powerful methodology in action in Scotland to improve experiences of fishers in the UK. We are encouraged by the different stakeholders working together to forge this groundbreaking partnership.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

FLEX is a UK charity working to end labour exploitation by challenging and transforming the systems and structures that make workers vulnerable to abuse. FLEX conducts research, advocacy work, coalition and capacity building, and strategic communications.

Contact: Poppy Reid at media@labourexploitation.org

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is a democratic, affiliate-led federation recognised as the world's leading transport authority. We exist solely to protect and improve workers' lives and futures. The ITF organises and encourages international solidarity among transport workers in every corner of the globe and supports 700 affiliate trade unions in 152 countries, representing 18.5 million workers – including seafarers and over 144,000 fishers worldwide. The ITF's vision is of a world where fishers are empowered to fight for and win safer working conditions, better wages and benefits, and stronger protections – in the workplace, nationally, regionally, and globally.

Contact: Chris Williams at Williams_Chris@itf.org.uk

The Fair Food Programme (FFP)

The Fair Food Programme is a unique partnership among farmers, farmworkers, and retail food companies that ensures humane wages and working conditions for the farmworkers. It protects tens of thousands of farmworkers harvesting over a dozen crops throughout the U.S., Chile, and South Africa.

Contact: Ty Joplin at ty@fairfoodprogram.org

Dr Jess Sparks

Dr Jess Sparks is an Assistant Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University (formerly Associate Director of the Ecosystems and Environment Programme at the University of Nottingham Rights Lab). Her research focuses on understanding a range of working conditions from decent work to forced labour and human trafficking in marine capture fisheries.

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Industry contacts:

The Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA)

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SEA Alliance

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