

August 3, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I am writing to request that the Department of State take action as appropriate on Indonesia with respect to its seafood exports to our country. Among the reasons for seeking this action are the ongoing problems with human trafficking in fishermen slaves, the significant contribution of Indonesian fishing vessels to the overfishing of bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), the unreliability of Indonesia's fishery statistics, and the unaccountably high longline bigeye catch limit for Indonesia. Taken together, these have a damaging impact on the Hawaii longline fishing industry which has become the global standard for environmentally responsible pelagic longline fishing.

According to the Department of State's own report¹, Indonesia continues to collude with Thai fishing companies to recruit and enslave its own people and other Southeast Asians (principally Burmese, Laotians and Cambodians) on fishing vessels². Reports indicate that the Indonesian Island of Benjina in particular is essentially a huge prison compound for fishermen slaves, where men are locked in cages when not deployed on fishing vessels. Treatment of fishermen slaves at sea is reportedly brutal, with many slave crewmen dying then being buried on Benjina with false documentation.

Indonesia fisheries also contribute to a chronic ongoing management problem in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) by their large catches of juvenile bigeye tuna, which greatly depress the maximum sustainable yield for the stock, and which have direct impacts on the Hawaii longline fishery. Management of longline caught bigeye by the Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission (WCPFC) is through catch quotas which have been successively reduced for the U.S. fishery based in Hawaii, from 4,181 mt in 2005 to 3,345 mt in 2017.

Paradoxically, and without explanation, the WCPFC awarded Indonesia a bigeye longline quota of 5,889 mt, as aspirational catch should they wish to expand their longline fishery. Indonesia already catches about 24,000 mt of bigeye annually through a variety of fishing gears, including longlines (2,700 mt)³. However well-documented gaps in institutional management structure, including monitoring, reporting, and enforcement, means that Indonesian fishery statistics are almost certainly unreliable and bigeye catches may be much higher than reported."

¹ Trafficking in Persons Report 2016, Department of State (www.state.gov/j/tip)

² Associated Press (2016). Fishermen Slaves, Human Trafficking and the Seafood We Eat.

³ WCPFC. 2015. Indonesia, Annual Report to the Commission Part 1: Information on Fisheries, Research, and Statistics. WCPFC SC 11 AR/CCM 09.

Last year, when the WCPFC quota for the U.S. longline fishery in Hawaii was 3,554 mt, the fishery was closed down in early August. This was compounded by a parallel closure in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) which has implemented a 500 mt bigeye longline quota for US vessels (Hawaii and West Coast based vessels) greater than 24 m. Since large (> 24 m) vessels are needed to access the EPO fishing grounds, these longliners had nowhere to fish. Although the fishery was able to minimize its losses under quota transfer agreements with the U.S Participating Territories, these agreements are subject to strict review for compliance with the Commission's objectives to end overfishing of bigeye. There is no guarantee that agreements will continue to be available to this fishery.

Further, although the Magnuson Stevens Act National Standard 1 guidelines clearly discourage unilateral action by the United States that disadvantages its fishermen relative to foreign fisheries, the United States continues to agree to severe cuts in US longline quota, while agreeing to more favorable treatment of foreign fisheries, like those in Indonesia. This is particularly troublesome given that the United States leads Pacific fisheries in reducing impacts on non-target fish stocks, protected species, and seabirds.

Indonesia exported nearly 160,000 mt of seafood to the US worth some \$2 billion in 2014⁴. Among these exports were yellowfin tuna treated with carbon monoxide (see attached), which can conceal spoilage that threatens public health. Please note the price of \$12/lb, undercutting local Hawaii fishermen who receive \$2-4/lb for their fresh yellowfin. Clearly, the US is a major export market for Indonesia, where just shrimp alone amounts to about 81,000 mt worth a billion dollars. I believe that the arguments for US action against Indonesia are irrefutable. The US should demand an end to the slave trade in fishermen, insist on improvements in Indonesia's fishery statistics that reflect true catches, and negotiate a U.S. longline catch limit that is fair and does not impose an excessive conservation burden on our small but very important fishery.

Sincerely

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

Edwin Ebisui Jr
Council Chair

cc:

Kerri-Ann Jones, Assistant Secretary for Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental & Scientific Affairs, Department of State

David Balton, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries, Department of State

US Pacific Islands Congressional Delegations

⁴ Fisheries of the United States, 2014,
http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/commercial/fus/fus14/documents/07_Trade2014.pdf