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# Going Digital for Sustainability

## *Traceability is the backbone of sustainability*

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Consumers around the globe want to know where their food comes from and want to have the confidence that it meets the highest quality and sustainability standards.

Traceability – the ability to track a product in granular detail from its place of origin all the way to the consumer – is a key component that benefits producers and consumers by bringing transparency to the entire system.

The challenges and opportunities are particularly acute for the fishing and seafood industry.

Activities that take place at sea can be difficult to monitor or supervise. All too often, only those on boats understand the conditions faced and the type of fishing being conducted. This lack of monitoring has led to unacceptable labor and fishing violations, resulting in human rights abuses and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Thai Union believes traceability, the backbone of sustainability, is key to combatting these issues.

The information derived from traceability is extremely powerful – not only does it help guard against IUU fishing, but it also helps monitor labor standards on vessels and protect stock levels for the future. For example, knowing how many yellowfin tuna are taken from the Indian Ocean by different fishing vessels will allow the Regional Fishery Management Organization (RFMO) to monitor the stock levels of the species.

As part of the journey towards full traceability, Thai Union is a founding member of and works closely with the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), which has developed the Proactive Vessel Register (PVR). The PVR provides validated information on the steps each



Fishing boats in Southern Thailand. Credit: Thai Union

vessel is taking to implement sustainability commitments. Thai Union is committed to increasing the amount of fish we purchase from PVR listed vessels – in fact, from the start of 2016 all the large-scale purse seiners Thai Union purchases from are registered, and the company is actively encouraging all its suppliers to join.

### **A DIGITAL REVOLUTION**

In many ways, the fishing industry is behind the curve when it comes to applying new technologies and innovation. The reason is simple: it is a lot harder to build technology onto a fishing boat and connect it via satellite to the internet than it might be at a farm or factory.

Today, even many of the most ethical and sustainable seafood companies use paper-based systems to track at least part of their supply chain. But any paper-based system lacks efficiency and is susceptible to simple human error.

Fortunately, the fishing industry has evolved significantly, making the unimaginable years ago, now possible.

Thai Union and Mars Petcare, along with a coalition of other industry and government groups such as the U.S. Agency for International Development's Oceans and Fisheries Partnership (USAID Oceans), recently launched an innovative pilot program that has the potential to start a digital revolution. Inmarsat's "Fleet One" terminals were successfully installed on fishing vessels in Thailand, while the crew members, captains and fleet owners were trained on "Fish Talk" chat applications developed by Xsense that enable them to connect with families and peers around the world while at sea – an industry first for Thai fisheries.

The pilot program will test scalable platforms for electronic Catch Data and Traceability (eCDT) systems that utilize mobile applications and satellite connectivity, making it possible to demonstrate

true electronic end-to-end traceability and supply chain management.

By capturing information digitally at every stage, Thai Union is able to share selected data with the rest of the industry, regulators, retailers and ultimately, consumers. The company's traceability program also extends to all significant ingredient components as well as packaging suppliers.

More importantly for human rights, the use of 'Fish Talk' in the pilot brings with it the ability for the workers on the vessels to use a compressed chat function to communicate with loved ones back on shore, making what can be a lonely job more connected and supported.

The system gives suppliers the ability to:

- Improve efficiency of traceability records validated by fishery managers and manage risk in the supply chain;
- Demonstrate true electronic end-to-end traceability and supply chain management with linkages to markets such as the United States and European Union to better address concerns with IUU fishing and labor issues in fisheries.

The seafood industry needs to continue to work to bring full transparency and digital traceability into the supply chain, and this pilot is a major step in the right direction, according to Darian McBain, Thai Union's group director for sustainable development. "In the long run, traceability will help make the entire fishing industry more sustainable, protecting the environment and workers, while delivering a high-quality products and important nutrition to consumers across the globe."

"We are proud to partner with Thai Union to launch this pilot program. Providing connectivity at sea for workers is a milestone in responsible and ethical sourcing," said Isabelle Aelvoet, Global Sustainability Director at Mars Petcare. "We know it will contribute to assuring traceability and we are confident it will soon become a standard across entire fishing industry."

The launch of the pilot program follows Thai Union's 2016 announcement of an ambitious \$90m strategy to ensure 100 percent of its branded tuna is sustainably sourced with a commitment of achieving a minimum of 75 percent by 2020.

As part of the new tuna strategy, Thai Union is investing in initiatives that will increase the supply of sustainable tuna. This includes establishing 11 new Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) around the world. A FIP is a program to transform a fishery, ensuring sustainable fish stocks, minimized environmental impacts, and improved management of the fishery. The strategy also identified traceability as the key to sustainability and safe and legal labor in the tuna industry.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION**

USAID Oceans and Thai Union in March announced a broad partnership to combat IUU fishing, promote fair and ethical seafood supply chains, and improve the sustainability of fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Together, both organizations will support the design and implementation of digital catch documentation and traceability (CDT) systems in tuna fisheries in Thailand and Indonesia, with future expansion to other countries and fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region. USAID Oceans and Thai Union will also partner to improve fisheries management practices; form partnerships with governments and other industry stakeholders to improve transparency in seafood supply chains; and explore linking additional features to CDT systems, including labor data and crew communications to promote responsible and equitable labor practices in the seafood sector.

Additionally, USAID Oceans and Thai Union will cooperate to demonstrate best practices in implementing electronic traceability, as a model for the industry and governments to address IUU fishing, sustainable fisheries management and fair labor monitoring. USAID Oceans and Thai Union will collaborate on various CDT systems and labor reporting tools on fishing vessels in Thailand in partnership with the Thai Department of Fisheries and several technology companies – which includes the aforementioned pilot program as part of this overall effort.

Also, at the recent UN Oceans Summit in New York City, Thai Union committed to the World Economic Forum's Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration. The Declaration supports the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

which were adopted by all 193 Heads of State via a UN Resolution in September 2015 at a UN summit. Thai Union has identified three SDGs it can most contribute toward: zero hunger, decent work and economic growth, and life below water. This initiative will actively contribute to the latter, helping to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

The Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration has been endorsed by leaders of the world's biggest retailers, tuna processors, marketers, traders and harvesters, with the support of influential civil society organizations and governments. The entities endorsing the Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration have committed to concrete actions and partnerships to demonstrate their commitment to implement the Declaration and Action Agenda.

And Thai Union participates in the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability, an international, business-to-business platform established by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to advance a unified framework for interoperable seafood traceability practices. The Dialogue brings together a broad spectrum of seafood industry stakeholders from across different parts of the supply chain, as well as relevant civil society experts from diverse regions.

"Thai Union is proud of these collaborations to further combat IUU fishing, promote fair and ethical supply chains, and improve sustainable fisheries and marine conservation in the Asia-Pacific region," said McBain. "We believe public and private sector collaboration is a key component to drive positive change ensuring the seas are sustainable now and in the future. Involvement from international institutions not only assists industry participants to understand the importance of change in these critical areas, but also helps validate the progress which is achieved." ■

*To read more about Thai Union's sustainability strategy, visit [www.seachangesustainability.org](http://www.seachangesustainability.org).*

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