

# Photos: Agents Probe Ship for Signs of Illegal Fishing

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Tuna is hoisted above a fishing vessel at Port No. 23 near Bangkok.

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On a cloudy September day at Bangkok Port on the Chao Phraya River southeast of Thailand's capital city, a fisheries inspector walked alongside a Panamanian vessel as workers pulled frozen tuna from its cargo hold into nets that would be winched and then emptied into the steel container of a nearby truck.

Trailing behind him were a half dozen Thai officials and foreign experts who offered guidance on how to perform tough

port inspections that the country has begun carrying out as a party to a United Nations treaty aimed at combating illegal fishing.



An inspector at Bangkok Port examines a Panamanian vessel for signs of illegal fishing.

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The Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) came into force in June 2016 with Thailand and more than two dozen other countries as parties; the treaty has 50 members as of November 2017, and more governments are expected to join soon.

Ports in Asia and elsewhere that are known for lax law enforcement and minimal inspections are a prime pathway for illegally caught seafood to enter the supply chain.

Although every PSMA ratification will help curb illegal fishing, Thailand's signature was particularly crucial: It is the world's fourth largest seafood exporter.

With the treaty in place, operators of foreign-flagged vessels who want to use Thailand's ports must request permission to do so from the country's fisheries authority, which may refuse entry to known or suspected illegal fishers pending the outcome of an inspection.

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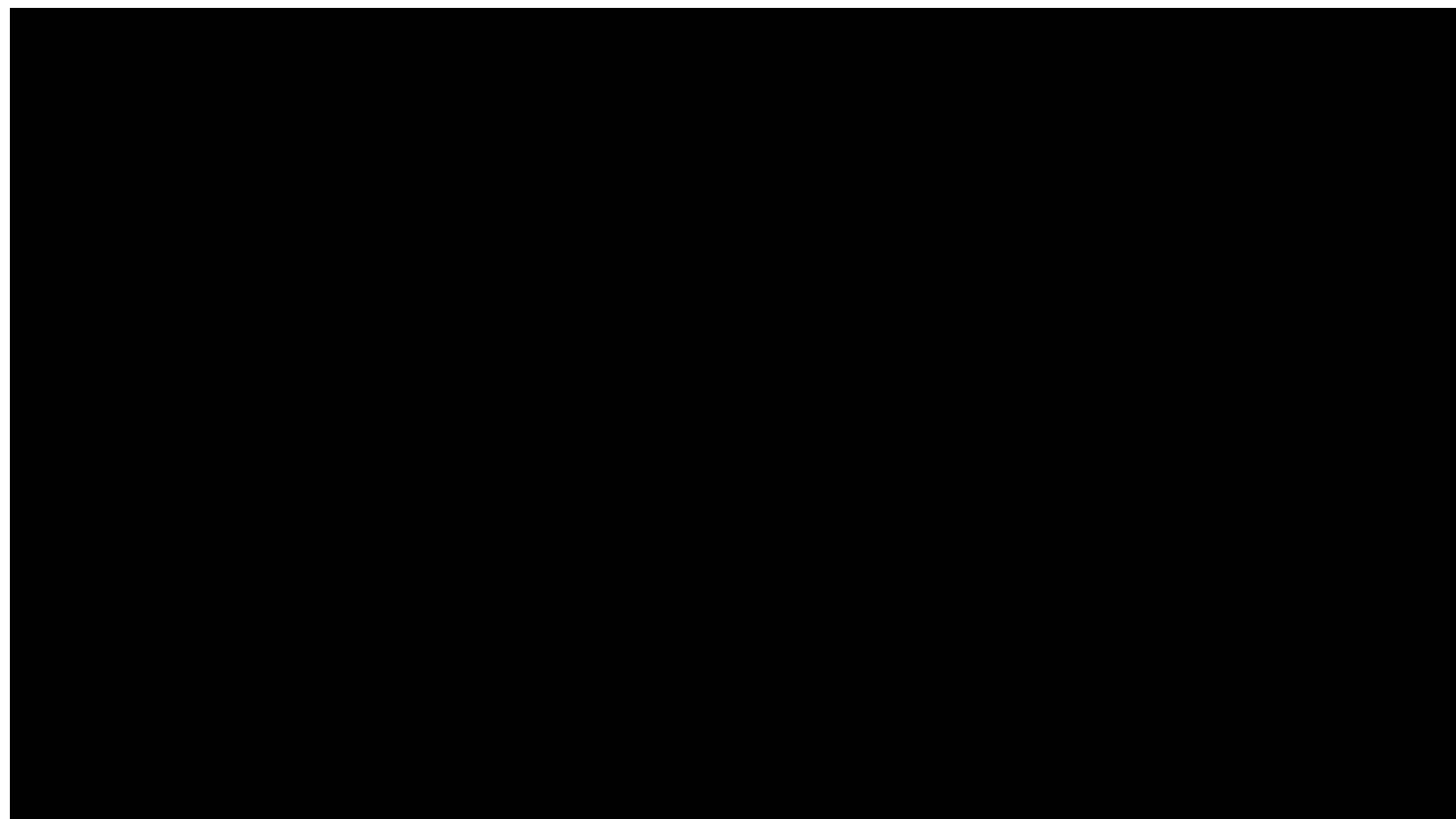
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Although the PSMA applies only to foreign-flagged vessels, Thailand is also expected to bolster inspections for domestic vessels. The Pew Charitable Trusts is supporting a commitment by OceanMind, a U.K.-based nonprofit that uses satellite technology to monitor maritime activity, to give Thailand the technology and analysis it needs to improve surveillance and enforcement.

Standing on the upper deck of the Panamanian fishing vessel that day, the group watched as Thai workers began unloading hundreds of tons of frozen tuna. The inspectors examined the fish to see whether protected species such as bluefin were mixed in with legal catch.





A training team monitors workers in the cargo hold below as they offload tuna.

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The temperature in the hold is minus 22 degrees Celsius, so workers wore heavy woolen clothing. Each frozen skipjack carcass weighs about 40 kilograms (88 pounds); one ton of skipjack fetches about \$1,600 on the wholesale market.



Workers pull tuna into nets in the hold, where the temperature is minus 22 degrees Celsius.

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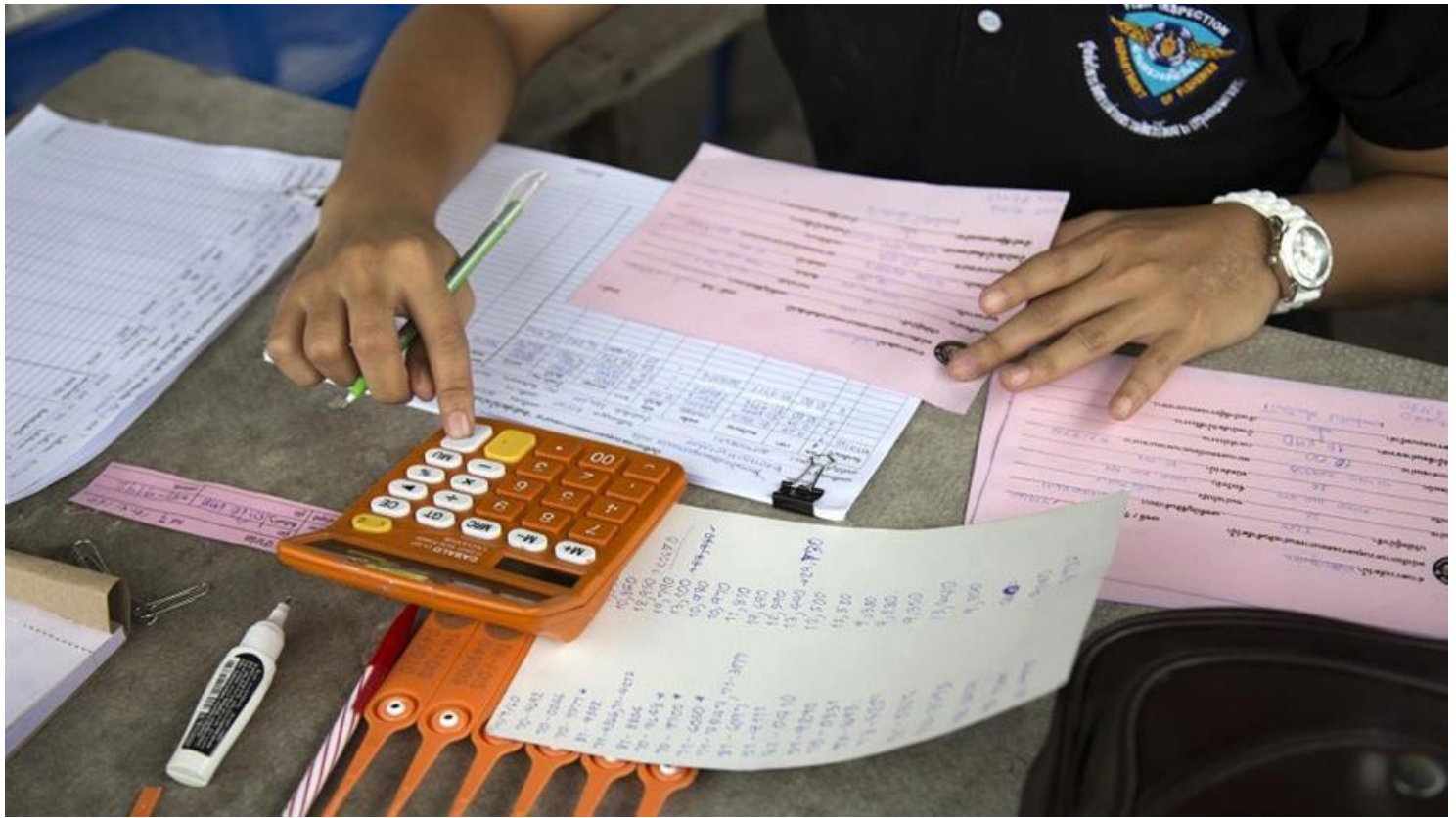
Inside the ship's wheelhouse, a trainer showed the Thai officials how to examine the logbooks. The crew had declared that the tuna had been transferred from other vessels--a key detail, because unreported transfers of catch at sea are illegal. Inspectors often can determine whether that happened by checking the temperature log of the hold. Upticks in thermometer readings might indicate a transshipment.

The trainer checked the vessels' authorizations, the amount of tuna in the hold, and its destination for processing. And then he crunched the numbers. If the volume of the reported catch had exceeded the hold's capacity, it might have indicated that the vessel had hidden compartments for storing fish. This turned out not to be the case.

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A fisheries inspection trainer crunches numbers while showing inspections officers how to examine logbooks.

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As a further precaution, the inspector weighed the fishing company's truck before and after it was loaded to ensure that it carried only the tuna the crew had just landed. He then sealed the truck's doors--to bar entry until it reached the processing factory--and placed an orange tag on the back, authorizing the truck to leave port.

Tawom Thunjai, an officer with Thailand's Fish Quarantine and Inspection Division, said his staff's training in these measures reflects the country's "deep commitment" to meeting the treaty's obligations.

"We are working very hard to improve our risk assessment and inspections, which are preventing illegal operators from getting their fish into Thai ports," he said.

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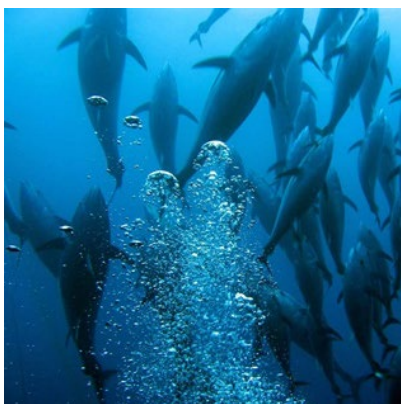
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Frozen tuna is lowered into trucks for transport to a processing plant. A fisheries inspector will seal the truck's doors to ensure that none are offloaded before reaching the processing factory.

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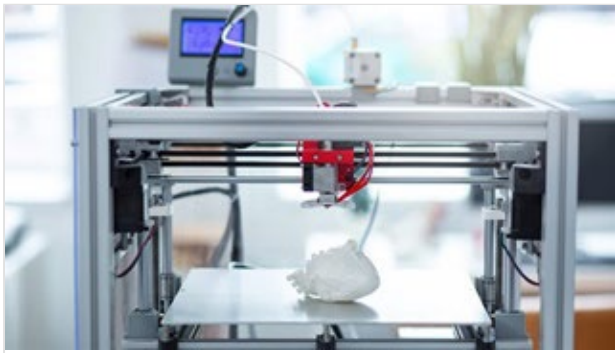


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