Supermarket giants in Thailand for prawn slavery talks

Morrison and Tesco join Oxfam and others to create a taskforce to tackle slavery and trafficking in the seafood industry

Source:

UK and US supermarket groups are meeting in Thailand this week to create a taskforce to tackle trafficking and forced labour in the shrimp feed industry.

The talks follow a Guardian investigation last month that uncovered slavery in the supply chains of Thai seafood sold to major international retail brands.

The three-day meeting will be hosted by Charoen Pokphand (CP) Foods, the world's largest prawn farmer, which the Guardian found buys fishmeal from suppliers that own, operate or buy from fishing boards manned with slaves.

Morrisons, Tesco and Costco US, which buy farmed shrimp from CP Foods, are among the retailers expected to attend the talks with Thai government representatives. Several international catering and food-service firms including Sodexo, Brakes as well as campaigners from Oxfam and the Environmental Justice Foundation will be among the attendees.

CP Foods acted after several retailers, including Whole Foods and Carrefour, pulled out of CP contracts in Thailand after the revelations.

The six-month inquiry into Thailand's seafood industry found slavery was helping to
fuel one of the country's major export economies, and that men were being bought and sold like cattle and kept against their will on ships for years without pay and under the threat of violence.

The aim of the meeting is to agree on the terms of an industry action group, which will work with CP Foods to establish a global benchmark in sustainable shrimp-feed production. It will also help the Thai government create a strategy to halt human trafficking and forced labour in the seafood supply chain.

According to sources, in addition to meetings in Bangkok with senior Thai officials, activities will include trips to CP Foods' fish-feed factories and new production lines as well as to the southern coastal province of Songkhla to talk to fishing boat owners to get "real feedback from the ground".

"A number of suppliers are meeting CP this week to ensure that our concerns are being addressed," Morrisons said. "We'll also be meeting with other suppliers in the area to ensure collaboration rather than duplication of effort."

Sodexo said it was attending the meeting to better understand CP's food supply chain and measures being taken to improve labour conditions in the Thai seafood industry.