



ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
OF FISHING ENTERPRISES IN THE EU

EU-Thailand Free Trade Agreement: European tuna industry sounds the alarm

Brussels, 31 March 2025

Starting today, the European Commission will kick off a week of negotiations on the draft free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union and Thailand. These discussions, interrupted for several years and relaunched a couple of years ago, are causing concern in the European tuna industry. Europêche, the leading representative body for the fishing industry in Europe, calls for the exclusion of tuna products from this agreement.

A risk of destabilization of the European tuna market

Thailand is the world's largest producer and exporter of tuna, with an annual production of about 470,000 tons of canned and prepared tuna. Currently, an average of 10,000 tonnes are exported to the EU each year, subject to a 24% tariff. If the FTA was to include tuna products, the derogation of these taxes would automatically lead to a massive influx of imports, given the considerable export potential of the Thai sector. The impact would be immediate on:

- **The European sector, especially tuna fleets**, faced with increased and unfair competition,
- **Low-quality of products in supermarkets**, with an influx of seafood with lower social, environmental and control standards.

A European model threatened by unfair competition

In the ultra-competitive global tuna market, the European fleet of tuna purse seiners is recognised as a model of sustainability and responsibility. The fleet respects strict quotas, is monitored 24/7 by VMS, systematically embarks scientific observers meaning 100% observer coverage and applies stringent control, monitoring and control regulation. Besides, the fleet is also certified by MSC label, as well as AENOR (APR) and AFNOR norms, respectively the highest environmental and social standards. Those rules and standards make in the most expensive tuna fleet to run in the world.

However, the EU tuna fleet is facing significant challenges, as evidenced by the recent shutdown of two relevant companies (Via Océan – formerly Saupiquet – and Nicra 7) in 2024. These companies have to compete in international waters and markets with non-EU fleets that do not respect the same standards, or even engage in IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing.

Xavier Leduc, President of Europêche Tuna Group, explains: “Tuna loins and cans processed in Thailand from low-standard Asian fisheries pose a direct threat to sustainable European fleets, which face higher costs due to their rigorous control, social, and environmental standards. A Free Trade Agreement with Thailand allowing duty-free tuna products into the EU would only deepen the existing imbalance, further disadvantaging European fleets and undermining fair competition.”

On the other hand, Thailand, has worrying structural shortcomings:

- Its processing industry imports whole tuna massively from countries with opaque practices in terms of sustainability and sanitary compliance.
- It has failed to implement International Labour Organisation's Convention 188, major international conventions on human rights and work at sea, and to ratify major other ones¹
- The European Commission's latest audit in 2023 highlighted persistent flaws in health and food safety, revealing its inability to ensure standards that comply with European requirements.

The EU and its contradictions: a call for common sense

European fisheries are coming up against the EU's paradoxes: while Brussels continues to impose increasingly restrictive regulations on its own companies, it simultaneously allows the import of products that do not meet these same standards.

Faced with this observation, Europêche calls on the European Union to exclude tuna products from the draft free trade agreement with Thailand and maintain a strict rules of origin. This will help preserve the European tuna sector and guarantee a level playing field.

Anne-France Mattlet, Director of Europêche Tuna Group, says: "Under current regulations, the EU cannot block low-standard tuna entering EU market—but it must not let it in duty-free."

ENDS

Press contact:

Anne-France Mattlet, Europêche Tuna Group Director: +33 678 11 63 01 anne-france.mattlet@europeche.org

¹ ILO C87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and ILO C98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining