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Landmark U.S. ruling allows Indonesians to proceed with lawsuit against Bumble Bee for forced labor on fishing boats

Tanya Brooks
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Indonesian fishers who sued Bumble Bee, alleging years of forced labor while catching fish sold by the US tuna brand, responded to the company's motion to dismiss their suit, arguing in the U.S. legal filing on July 31 that they have a right to have their allegations heard in court. This image was taken by Greenpeace USA activists in solidarity with these fishers.

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SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA (November 13, 2025) — The case of a group of Indonesian fishers who sued U.S. tuna brand Bumble Bee, alleging forced labor, will move forward, according to a judgment released by the Southern California federal district court yesterday. Their case, which cites years of research from the Greenpeace global network, alleges years of forced labor while catching fish sold by the company.

Syafi'i, a plaintiff in the case, said: "I'm actually in tears. I am happy and overwhelmed. This gives me hope for justice for me and my fellow plaintiffs as we struggle for justice and change for the better. Our fight and sacrifice are not in vain in order to get justice for all of the fishers. I remain steadfast, strong, and enthusiastic."

The four fishers filed suit against Bumble Bee in March 2025 under the

Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPPRA). Investigations and supply chain research from the Greenpeace global network's Beyond Seafood fisheries campaigns were used by the litigants' attorneys to support this complaint. It is believed to be the first case of its kind against the seafood industry in the U.S., and one of only a few TVPPRA supply chain cases to move past the motion to dismiss stage.

Sari Heidenreich, Senior Human Rights Advisor, Greenpeace USA, said: "This is a historic moment and an incredible victory for the fishers and the ocean. By allowing this case to move ahead, the court has given these fishers' voices the space they deserve. We celebrate that the fishers will be allowed their day in court, recognizing this is monumental — not only for these four men, who are brave enough to stand up to a giant U.S. corporation — but for hundreds of thousands of fishers globally."

The court ruled that the fishers presented sufficient allegations of forced labor as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, noting that Bumble Bee did not contest the fishers were subject to forced labor. The court also found that Bumble Bee "likely had 'notice about the prevalence' of forced labor on the vessels from which it sourced tuna, 'failed to take adequate steps to train staff in order to prevent its occurrence,'" had an "active role in obtaining albacore tuna from the vessels on which Plaintiffs were subject to forced labor," and resold the tuna for profit.

Heidenreich continued: "This ruling once again affirms that U.S. companies have a responsibility to ensure the products they sell — including tuna that they market for you to pack for lunch — were not produced with the abhorrent crimes of forced labor and modern slavery. Allegations as horrific as those in the suit should never happen to these fishers or anyone else. Seafood companies cannot continue to put profits over all else; they cannot continue this rabid exploitation of workers, the oceans, and marine life. They must act now to address the root causes of modern slavery and end isolation at sea. The global Greenpeace network's Beyond Seafood Campaign has been working for over a decade to hold Big Seafood to account. It is an affirmation of the importance of this work that the campaign's reports documenting these abuses were cited by the judge in her ruling."

The judge's ruling also cited numerous reports from Greenpeace East Asia and Greenpeace Southeast Asia as evidence that the company knew or should have known about forced labor on its supplying vessels. [1]

Arifsyah Nasution, Global Project Lead for Beyond Seafood Campaign, Greenpeace Southeast Asia, said: "With this ruling, all of Big Seafood is officially on notice: exploitation at sea could land you in court at home. It is well known that physical violence, excessive working hours, and lack of payment — all conditions alleged in this lawsuit — are prevalent in the fishing industry and exacerbated by the overexploitation of our oceans."

The Greenpeace global network's Beyond Seafood Campaign has called for concerted action by all stakeholders and governments along the seafood supply chain to **end isolation at sea**. This includes:

- Free, accessible, and secure Wi-Fi on all fishing vessels to allow fishers to have contact with their families, unions, and governments.
- Capping time at sea at three months to reduce the risk of human rights abuse, forced labor, and human trafficking.
- 100% human or electronic observer coverage to ensure vital data on catch composition, bycatch, interactions with protected species, and overall fishing practices are reported by independent and impartial parties.

Freedom of association and access to unions for workers are key enabling rights to ensure a strong worker voice and protections across the various stages of the

supply chain. It is essential to have accessible grievance mechanisms, including those available at sea, that are secure and responsive. These mechanisms should allow workers to raise issues as they arise, and companies must respond promptly, providing remedies and directly addressing the root causes of the problems.

The lawsuit, Akhmad v. Bumble Bee Foods LLC, No. 3:25-cv-00583, was filed in March 2025 in U.S. federal court in San Diego, California, and is currently before chief judge Cynthia Bashant. In addition to Greenpeace Inc., the plaintiffs in the suit are represented by the law firms of Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC and Schonbrun Seplow Harris Hoffman & Zeldes LLP.

Photos and videos are available in the [Greenpeace Media Library](#)

[1] [Fake My Catch: The Unreliable Traceability in our Tuna Cans](#)

[Choppy Waters: Forced Labour and Illegal Fishing in Taiwan's Distant Water Fisheries](#)

[Forced Labour at Sea: The Case of Indonesian Migrant Fishers](#)

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US soft on human trafficking in new report

The U.S. government has once again awarded unmerited rankings in its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report to two major players in the global seafood supply chain — Taiwan and Indonesia — despite acknowledging widespread forced labor, human trafficking, and weak government responses in both.

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