

Thai Trawler Operators Call for New Migrants to Fill Out Crews after Clampdown

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Trawler operators in some coastal provinces have asked the government to start a new round of migrant registrations to fill job vacancies after many workers quit during the clampdown on licences.

Somsak Kwan-on, who operates the trawler Sor Saksachon 97 in Hat Yai district of Songkhla province, said several trawler operators in the province face crew shortages after they temporarily closed their businesses when the new regulations curbing illegal fishing took effect. Some migrant crew members grew sick of waiting, especially those worried their trawler owners would run out of money to pay them.

While some trawlers have now complied with the government's regulations and can go back to sea, they are unable to fish because they do not have enough crew, Mr Somsak said.

Many trawlers stayed in port rather than risk penalties when the regulations took effect on July 1. Many operators also had to cover the living costs of their crew during this time.

"Things went from bad to worse. We can't fish because we don't have enough crewmen and we must cover their costs," Mr Somsak said, adding his five crew quit after they received their salaries.

He urged the government to provide a new round of registration services for migrant workers.

It is difficult for operators to look for new workers now because the registration drive ended on June 29, Mr Somsak added.

A number of migrant crewmen have turned their backs on the fishing industry to look for better paid jobs elsewhere, Mr Somsak said.

Ting Poonpon, 65, a fishing boat operator in Chachoengsao's Bang Pakong district, said several boats in the province remain docked due to a lack of crew.

She asked the government to bend the rules and allow relatives aged under 18 of fishermen to work on the boats until the next migrant registration starts.

Ms Ting also said it is unfair that operators are forced to take responsibility for the registration costs of the migrant workers.

"Migrant workers work with us for a couple of weeks and then leave the job to look for one that offers better pay," she said.

Meanwhile, Somchai Sapsinphaiboon, the president of Phan Thai Norasing fishermen group in Samut Sakhon, is calling on the government to lift its ban on some types of "destructive" fishing gear when the trawlers are only fishing for small aquatic animals, such as krill.

Small fishing boats, with only 1-2 crew, can use push nets to catch small fish and the gear would not harm marine life, he added. Tiny shrimp is abundant in the coastal provinces — Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram and Samut Prakan — with about 700 small fishing boats in total plying their trade in those areas.

Under the current fishing law, four destructive types of fishing gear, consisting of the otter trawl, push net, day anchovy purse seine, and anchovy falling net, cannot be used without a licence. The Department of Fisheries stopped granting licences for otter trawl and push nets in 1981 and the other two forms of fishing gear in 2000