

The National Fisheries Association of Thailand is reportedly seeking to recruit some 70,000 “alien” workers from countries such as Cambodia to fill shortfalls in an industry notorious for human rights abuses.

NFAT has proposed a plan to fill a labour void with undocumented migrant workers who would be given temporarily exemption from immigration violations, Andy Hall, foreign expert at Mahidol University’s Institute of Population and Social Research in Bangkok, said yesterday.

“What they’re saying basically is they’re being forced to recruit illegal migrant workers and they need more workers legally,” he said.

“The sector needs 140,000 workers, but it can find only half of them,” NFAT board member, Mongkhon Sukcharoentana, was quoted as saying in The Nation newspaper last Friday.

Fishing operators had resorted to hiring illegal alien workers in the face of the labour shortage, he reportedly said.

Employment Department deputy director general Prawit Kiangphon said the Thai Labour Ministry agreed with the plan, adding fishing operators had agreed to provide contracts for workers in order to afford them legal status, The Nation reported.

Pressure from the United States’ Trafficking in Persons report, which kept Thailand on the Tier 2 watch list and identified the trafficking of fishermen as a major concern amid declining pools of people willing to work on the boats, had caused the industry to rethink, Andy Hall said. “Its pretty terrible stuff, many people don’t want to work on the boats if they know what conditions are like,” he said.

At a meeting early this month, Somkiat Chayasriwong, Permanent Secretary of the Thai Ministry of Labour acknowledged both Thai and foreign workers had refused to work in the sector because of “harsh conditions”, according to the Labour Ministry website.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said yesterday that any effective steps to improve protections for migrant workers required sustained government intervention.

Fishing operators in Thailand have been given a deadline to register alien workers by August 13. NFAT officials were unavailable for comment.

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<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2011072750660/National-news/thai-boats-recruit-aliens.html>