

Seven labour coordination centres will be set up to tackle serious problems in the fishing industry including the shortage of workers, illegal migrant workers and human trafficking.

The Labour and Social Development and Human Security ministries have joined with the National Fisheries Association to set up the labour coordination centres.

It follows repeated claims of gross abuses by the skippers of Thai fishing vessels, as a swag of migrant workers have told of being enslaved on vessels while colleagues were killed or forced to flee without being paid for months of torrid work.

Department of Employment (DoE) head Suthassanee Suebwongphaet said yesterday a special sub-committee had been set up to manage labour for the industry. Fishery labour coordination centres would be set up in Samut Sakhon, Trat, Rayong, Chumphon, Songkhla, Ranong and Satun - with each chaired by a provincial governor.

The seven centres would help find labourers and ensure justice for employers and employees, as well as curb human trafficking in the sector.

The Fisheries Association would be the main coordination centre and the only agency to act as an employer of migrant workers in fisheries. It would provide labourers for its member bodies, she explained.

The association would gather details on labour demands from fishery businesses via the seven coordination centres. The association would then report to the Department to provide workers, she said. It would keep some 5 per cent of workers in reserve.

To help solve problems of illegal migrant workers and issues of human trafficking, she said the DoE would recruit workers through contracts with neighbouring countries. It would recruit migrant workers allowed to live in Thailand, and victims of trafficking willing to work in the Thai fisheries sector.

Ranong Governor Wanchat Wongchaichana said yesterday they would have a "major clean-up" of illegal workers, after the second round of registering migration workers ended on July 15 for general workers and August 15 for fishery labourers.

Illegal worker issues had been chronic and affected the province in many ways - socially, public health, the environment and crime, he said.

Wanchat said that this year 57,770 immigrant workers from Burma, Laos and Cambodia had registered for permission to work at various establishments in Ranong, an increase of 19,695 workers over the 38,075 workers last year. So far 5,317 migrant workers had passed the national identification process for work permit applications.

Wanchat said five groups of illegal workers could be targets for action by the governor, along with employers or people who harbour them. They were: 1/ Foreign workers with fake papers who would be arrested. 2/ Those abusing legal papers, such as border passes that allow foreigners to stay in Ranong for up to one week and overstay to work or move to other provinces. 3/ The large number of migrant workers who don't have any legal documents and resist worker registration; they would be arrested and sent back to their home countries. 4/ Those who carried "boat cards" who were allowed by law to stay on boats or fish market areas but who then stayed in rented houses or apartments. 5/ People from the ethnic [Rohingya](#) group who fled Burma to Ranong would also face legal action.

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