

Costco Taken to Court by CPM in Class Action Case for Knowingly Selling Slave Labor Shrimp to Unsuspecting Californians

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According to a complaint filed in the U.S. District Court this morning, the product of slave labor has found its way onto the dinner plates of California consumers who buy frozen farmed prawns and frozen meals from Costco and from Costco's supplier CP Foods.

According to co-lead attorney Niall McCarthy "Human suffering cannot be ignored to enhance a company's economic bottom line." The complaint charges that Costco is aware that the farmed prawns it purchases from Southeast Asian producers, including Defendant CP Foods, and then resells to California consumers, is derived from documented slavery, human trafficking and other illegal labor abuses. McCarthy further states, "California consumers are unknowingly supporting slave labor. The level of abuse is unspeakable. The truth needs to be exposed so consumers can make informed decisions . . . As we allege in the Complaint, Costco does not advise U.S. consumers, in its packaging or otherwise, that its farmed prawns products are tainted by the use of slave labor on Thai-flagged ships. "

This use of trafficked labor occurs on vessels that are known as "ghost ships" and the practice is also referred to as "pirate fishing."

Defendant Costco continues to purchase farmed prawns from Southeast Asian producers, including Defendant CP Foods, despite the fact that Costco knows that the feed for farmed prawns is the product of pirate fishing and the use of "ghost ships," according to the Complaint. CP Foods is a many tentacled global conglomerate. Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC is the parent company, based in Bangkok, Thailand. C.P. Food Products, Inc. is the U.S. distribution arm. Costco has an extensive and long-standing relationship with CP Foods and features its products

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prominently on its shelves.

“This lawsuit seeks to give Californians confidence that they are not serving slavery for dinner,” said Co-Lead Counsel Derek Howard of the Howard Law Firm in Mill Valley, CA.

“Costco has the clout to dictate terms to its suppliers and to enforce its policies against slave labor and human trafficking. But Costco prefers to mislead its customers and sell seafood tainted by slavery,” said Howard.

This unlawful and unethical conduct has been documented in great detail by non-governmental organizations including, the London-based Environmental Justice Foundation (“EJF”) which brought to light this horrendous problem in a ground-based report entitled, “Sold to the Sea.” Leading world news organizations, including The Guardian, which conducted a lengthy investigation into slavery on Thai and Thai based fishing vessels, have also documented egregious circumstances where Thai fishermen are forced to work in inhumane conditions – where some fishermen have been shackled, beaten or tortured, and many have been murdered.

Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, LLP filed the case, along with co-counsel at the Howard Law Firm and Jenkins, Mulligan & Gabriel, LLP. The Complaint seeks injunctive relief to prevent Costco and CP Foods from continuing to import and sell Thai frozen farmed prawns in California as long as the supply chain continues to be tainted by human rights abuses as well as restitution to customers who bought the tainted products.