

US firm NAI's Indonesian arm partners on artisanal traceability project



Daniel Suchomel of Pelagic Data Systems installs a temperature logger as part of a traceability pilot project with PT Bali Seafood International and artisanal fishermen in Indonesia. Photo: David Solomon, CEO of Pelagic

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Matt Whittaker

Amid a push for increasing traceability in the seafood supply chain, a company sourcing fish from Indonesia for the North American market and a firm that makes data collection platforms have launched a pilot program aiming to boost artisanal fishing transparency.

North Atlantic Inc. (NAI) subsidiary PT Bali Seafood International and Pelagic Data Systems earlier this month launched a program that tracks artisanal fishing vessel movement, storage temperature and fishing practices in real time in the Indonesian archipelago.

The project — which will be used in assessing stocks — aims to increase the quality of landings.

Along the Asian nation's archipelago, up to 60% of the value of the seafood caught by some 800,000 fishermen is lost between harvest and arrival at the nation's processing infrastructure on the islands of Bali and Java, according to Jerry Knecht, founder and majority stockholder of NAI.

"The supply chain is completely broken," Knecht told *Undercurrent News*.

With the project — which is in its pilot phase and involves ten boats — Bali Seafood can more accurately monitor the quality of the fish it buys, which include snapper, grouper, mahi mahi and albacore, Knecht said.

Eventually, Bali Seafood wants to scale the system to as many as 350 of the vessels so that a pool can be established where fishermen pay \$10 a year to make the project self funding, Knecht said.

The ten boats under the current program will be among those serving serve [a micro-processing center Bali Seafood is planning](#), but for the time being the company is buying their product and having it co-packed, Knecht said.

The project uses solar powered global positioning system boxes and separate temperature monitoring boxes affixed to the boats.

Tracking boats' distance from shore, trip length and temperature data provides a tool for teaching best practices to fishermen as well as monitoring implementation, Knecht said.

By knowing a boat's location, the company can monitor what kind of fishing gear the vessels are using and understand which stocks are being pressured in different areas, Knecht said.

While the government wants to know the number and length of trips and areas fished, a manual system in place at the moment is often falsified, Knecht said.

The incentive for fishermen to get involved with the project is that Bali Seafood will use the data to pay based on grade, with fish that are kept cooler being more valuable, Knecht said. The company supplies fishermen with ice, he said.

The more high-quality fish fishermen have, the more they get paid, which incentivizes them to take care of their product and abide by sustainability rules, Knecht said.

“They understand that this is all moving toward a higher price for them,” Knecht said.

Bali Seafood and Pelagic add that the tracking system could ultimately help provide direct assess for artisanal fishermen to international markets.

The system ends up providing sustainable seafood that doesn't cost end consumers anything, Pelagic CEO David Solomon told *Undercurrent*.

Artisanal traceability systems that start at the dock and go through the processing and distribution channels don't provide visibility for what's happening on the water, Solomon said.

"We're trying to provide that clarity about what happens at sea," he said.

Pelagic is involved in talks on other planned pilot projects and later in the year plans to release information on pricing and availability, Solomon said.

Eugenia Mazal, operations manager with San Francisco-based Pelagic, pointed out that the company's tracking devices passively collect the data without needing input from fishermen.

"We don't want to make the fishermen's lives more complicated," she told *Undercurrent*.

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