



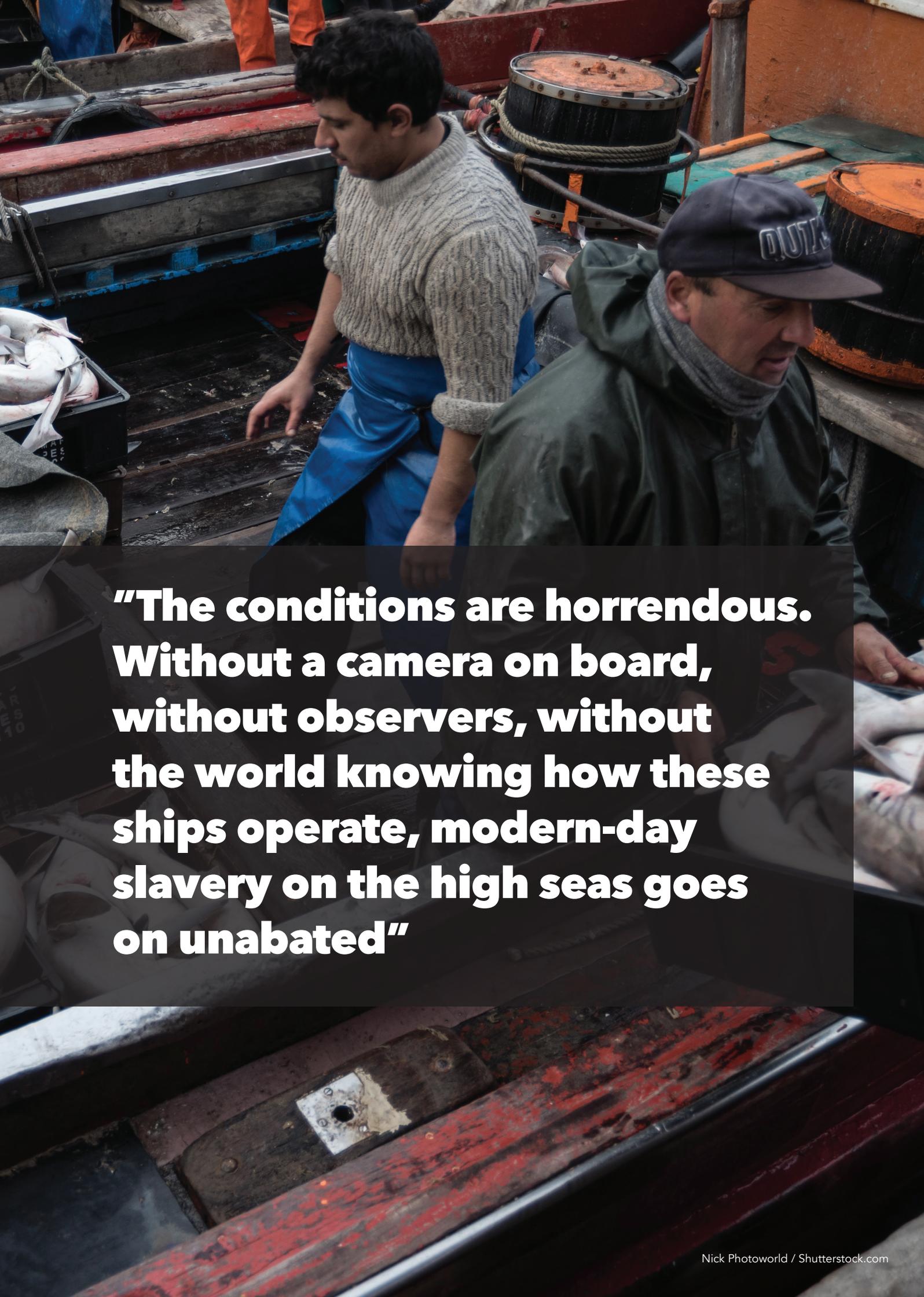
HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA



Human Rights at Sea
Insight Briefing Note

Slavery at Sea and Emperors of the Deep

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“The conditions are horrendous. Without a camera on board, without observers, without the world knowing how these ships operate, modern-day slavery on the high seas goes on unabated”

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EMPERORS OF THE DEEP

SHARK CONSERVATION ODYSSEY UNCOVERS UNEXPECTED SLAVERY

Filmmaker, author and ocean conservationist William McKeever set out researching his book *Emperors of the Deep* to learn about sharks and what was happening to them. He discovered that the tuna fishing industry was killing millions of them, and he was at first angry at the thousands of commercial fishermen that were decimating the global shark population for the Chinese shark fin soup market. Instead of accepting that they were bad people, he sought them out to understand them and found another truth, another unpalatable and shocking part of the story behind why sharks are facing the greatest threat they've ever had in their 450 million year history.

The book tackles all the issues surrounding their destruction including the lack of proper fisheries regulation. McKeever notes the link between tuna fisheries and shark survival: "With commercial fishing around the world and the pursuit of tuna, sharks are being caught in record numbers. The sad fact is that a hundred million sharks are killed every year, and the majority of those sharks go to make Chinese shark fin soup. For every 10 tuna caught for the canned tuna market, five sharks are caught. It's devastating."

And it is here that he encountered the truth about slavery at sea. Teaming up with Greenpeace, he discovered that the shark finning operations were mostly undertaken by slaves on Asian fishing vessels. Under the brutal oversight of the captain, they are forced to work long hours with little food and no medical care, and shark finning provides a modest income without which they would otherwise get little or no pay for their years of hard labour onboard.

McKeever went to Cambodia to get firsthand accounts from former slaves. One man revealed that he earned \$12 a month for the five years he was at sea from the finning. Others described the conditions they endured. One said: "We had to work day and night without hardly any sleep. Most on the boat had swollen faces, because they didn't get enough food."

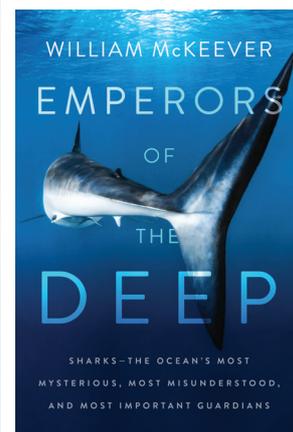
The author also engaged with Human Rights at Sea, having flown to London to interview the CEO and where cases that had come into the charity were discussed at length in terms of slavery, trafficking and human rights abuses at sea.



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William McKeever. Photo Credit: Debra Somerville



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Another said:

“My first days at sea were so brutal, I was scared, and all I could do was vomit up what little food they gave me. I just wanted to go back home, but the captain told me that the guy that was here before me, he killed. And if I didn’t do what he told me to do, he would kill me too.”

Another said: “There was never enough food to eat. They would just feed us some of the seafood that they caught. People did not have enough energy to work the hours that they forced on us. So they would give us drugs to keep working hard.”

And another said: “I tried to escape, and I got off the boat two times in the harbour, but the police went after me, and they caught me, and they brought me back to the boat. I was beaten for my desire to escape.”

Another punishment reported was to put men in the freezer for extended periods of time. “The conditions are horrendous. Without a camera on board, without observers, without the world knowing how these ships operate, modern-day slavery on the high seas goes on unabated,” says McKeever.

If fishermen working on these boats received adequate pay and were allowed to serve shorter terms, there wouldn’t be the need to fin sharks to try and make money, says McKeever. “So, there’s a connection between the human rights abuses and the finning of sharks. Regulation should ensure that crews have basic rights and adequate pay.”

In *Emperors of the Deep*, McKeever calls for a new system of regulation rather than Regional Fishery Management Organisations (RFMOs), which he says don’t always follow scientific advice. “If we got rid of the RFMOs and replaced them with regulatory oversight by the United Nations, we might finally have the proper regulation we need.”

However, the problems for shark survival don’t all relate to activities taking place on the high seas. McKeever was motivated to give up a job in finance and become an ocean conservationist after witnessing a shark tournament in Long Island, New York.

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“I was horrified that people were hunting sharks for so-called fun and entertainment, and at the end of their tournaments, they were throwing the sharks into the garbage.”

There are over 70 shark tournaments run regularly in the United States. What happens to the shark at a tournament? “Once the shark is hooked, it fights for its life in a contest that can take anywhere from a half to two hours to bring the shark to the boat – all the while these highly developed and sensitive mammals suffer intense pain. Once alongside the boat, the shark is gaffed with a metal hook anywhere on its body to haul it into the boat.

“The shark’s death agony is not over yet, since it is still alive and thrashing around the boat. Fishermen have to be careful with the shark at this point since it can still bite. Therefore, some will take a club and start beating the shark to death. Some will stick a knife deep into the shark’s back in an attempt to cut the spinal cord but they often miss their mark, which means more further suffering for the shark – all for the meaningless cause of becoming a trophy for the fisherman.”

When McKeever started investigating shark conservation, he found that not only are sharks in trouble globally, so are the oceans. “I decided that I couldn’t be involved in a more important cause that protecting both, so I left my job. My goal is to educate people about these issues and do that in film and in books.”

In *Emperors of the Deep*, McKeever describes how remarkable these animals are and the new scientific discoveries. He also explains their importance to marine ecosystems. He interviewed a vast number of people including for example, conservationists, and world-renowned shark experts, and the crew from Greenpeace’s *Rainbow Warrior*.”

The book gives a broad picture of the misunderstood world of sharks. “It is the first time many shark issues are tackled in one book”, says McKeever, and it is also a call for action. “Often, environmental problems – like climate change or forest destruction – are widely acknowledged, but governments, corporations and international bodies are unmotivated to make changes, or dismiss the solutions. However, my view is that the best way to get any government to take action is to expose a wrong and then get people angry enough to clamour for change.”

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Who We Are

BACKGROUND

Human Rights at Sea was established in April 2014. It was founded as an initiative to explore issues of maritime human rights development, review associated policies and legislation, and to undertake independent investigation of abuses at sea. It rapidly grew beyond all expectations and for reasons of governance it became a registered charity under the UK Charity Commission in 2015.

Today, the charity is an established, regulated and independent registered non-profit organisation based on the south coast of the United Kingdom. It undertakes **R**esearch, **A**dvocacy, **I**nvestigation and **L**obbying specifically for human rights issues in the maritime environment, including contributing to support for the human element that underpins the global maritime and fishing industries.

The charity works internationally with all individuals, commercial and maritime community organisations that have similar objectives as ourselves, including all the principal maritime welfare organisations.

OUR MISSION

To explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.



STAY IN CONTACT



We welcome any questions, comments or suggestions. Please send your feedback to:
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Human Rights at Sea is a Registered Charity in England and Wales No. 1161673. The organisation has been independently developed for the benefit of the international community for matters and issues concerning human rights in the maritime environment. Its aim is to explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.

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