

Pacific Andes' Lafayette still not authorized to fish in South Pacific; could be looking to reflag

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Sources said Pacific Andes' flagship mothership Lafayette could be looking to change flag, as its flag-state Russia has still not granted it approval to take part in this year's South Pacific jack mackerel fishery.

In February, the Lafayette caused a stir when it emerged that it was heading to the South Pacific fishery to transship catch from partnering trawlers, even though it is not authorized to take part in the fishery this year, neither for fishing nor transshipping.

Commenting to *Undercurrent News* in February, Pacific Andes had responded that it had applied to take part in the fishery. The approval has to be granted by its flag state Russia, which would then register this with the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO).

However, three months on, the authorization has still not been granted.

"The Lafayette asked the Russian Federation for an authorization to transship in the SPRFMO area," Robin Allen, executive secretary at the SPRFMO, told *Undercurrent* on May 28. "The Russian Federation advised us that they had not authorized the Lafayette to fish (including transshipment) in the SPRFMO area."

According to sources, the vessel is now looking to reflag as a result of this, to ask authorization from another country. Pacific Andes declined to comment on this.

“We have applied for authorization. We have not received the authorization or notice of a rejection,” a spokesperson told *Undercurrent News* on May 29. “Beyond this, we have no comment.”

Lafayette does not feature on the list of authorized vessels for this year’s jack mackerel fishery, and the list shows no vessel for Russia yet.

The vessel is owned by Pacific Andes’ fishing arm China Fishery Group.

Speaking to *Undercurrent* in February, Allen had said the SPRFMO was watching reports of “Lafayette and the accompanying trawlers with interest”.

The news that Lafayette was headed to the fishery in February prompted the SPRFMO secretariat to request that the vessel be inspected by Peruvian authorities as soon as it arrived at the Port of Ilo (Puerto de Ilo) in Peru.

The inspection, carried out on April 28, concluded that Lafayette was not taking part in the jack mackerel fishery in the South Pacific.

The inspectors reported that the Lafayette was not engaged in transshipment, was not equipped to catch, and had no finished products onboard, said a letter sent to the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO), dated May 21.

The inspection had been requested by Allen, “in order to check [Lafayette’s] participation in transshipment activities while in the SPRFMO area”, said a letter reporting on the inspection, signed by Peru’s director of fisheries policy and development at the vice ministry, Luis Fernando Castellanos Sanchez.

“During the inspection of the refrigerated holds, no finished product was found; only empty boxes, supplies, forklifts, pallets, spare parts – some holds were completely empty,” Castellanos wrote in his note.

“It was verified that the vessel has no fishing gear or system that enable it to capture any resources.”

The letter gives the following description of the vessel:

The Russian-flagged factory vessel LAFAYETTE receives raw material (jack mackerel) from other vessels in the high seas. The vessel has a plant for on-board freezing processing through a system based on horizontal plates called frozens.

This plant can produce boxes containing 20 kilograms of whole frozen fish; it has a production capacity of 1,500 tons of whole frozen fish per day; the product is stored in 10 refrigerated holds, each with a capacity of 1,000 tons.

The refrigerated holds are distributed in the different levels of the vessel.

Lafayette was Russia's only vessel registered for the fishery in 2010. Russia had two vessels, Leader and Sheriff, registered in 2011, and none in 2012 and 2013, partly due to the controversy that erupted over the catches it reported via Lafayette in 2010.

Transshipment data from the SPRFMO shows the vessels Enterprise, Liafjord, Pacific Champion, Pacific Hunter and Sheriff all transshipped to the Lafayette in 2012, while Pacific Champion, Conqueror, Hunter and Voyager transshipped to the vessel in 2010.