



Operated by Rongcheng Wangdao Ocean Aquatic Products, the Zhen Fa 7 has been accused of using forced labor to produce squid that was allegedly sold by Sysco, Kroger and others. Photo: Outlaw Ocean

NGO asks US government to bar squid imports from vessel implicated in Outlaw Ocean Project forced labor investigation

The Outlaw Ocean project said companies associated with purchasing product from the squid fishing vessel include Sysco, Kroger and H Mart.

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By [Rachel Sapin](#) 

The Human Trafficking Legal Center is asking the US government to bar imports of squid harvested using forced labor by the *Zhen Fa 7*, a Chinese distant water squid fishing vessel identified in an investigation conducted by the Outlaw Ocean Project.

The NGO submitted a Withhold Release Order (WRO) petition to the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency, requesting it prevent imports from entering the United States.

A WRO prevents imports from entering the United States due to “reasonable but not conclusive” evidence that forced labor was used in the overseas production of the goods.



Confidentiality agreements shroud MSC certification process for China processors accused of using forced labor

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The request follows [claims made in an investigation](#) by the nonprofit Outlaw Ocean Project and published in *The New Yorker* magazine earlier this month that show some seafood imports from China into the United States are produced using forced labor.

These products, according to the investigation, are making their way to consumers through major retailers in North America and Europe, including Walmart, Kroger and others.

The Outlaw Ocean project said companies associated with purchasing from the squid fishing vessel include massive US broadline distributor Sysco, US retail giant Kroger and US Asian supermarket chain H Mart.

Section 307 of the United States Tariff Act of 1930 prohibits the importation of all goods produced wholly or in part abroad by forced or prison labor. CBP personnel are authorized to detain any shipment that is believed to contain goods made with forced labor at any US port of entry. Since 2020, CBP has issued at least five WROs targeting the seafood industry.

More calls for import bans

The WRO petition follows one made by two US lawmakers, asking the Biden Administration to ban seafood imports from two Chinese provinces [they allege are home to major seafood processing plants using forced labor](#).

The lawmakers, who are part of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, sent a letter last week to the Department of Homeland Security asking for the agency to issue Withhold Release Orders (WROs) for all seafood processing facilities in Shandong and Liaoning provinces.

Shandong Province is one of the largest seafood processing and exporting hubs within China, according to a [report](#) by the US Department of Agriculture. Under US law, imports of products made wholly or in part by workers from North Korea and Xinjiang are prohibited.



Several suppliers mentioned in Outlaw Ocean investigation have audited their supply chains and found no wrongdoing

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Over the course of a four year investigation, the nonprofit Outlaw Ocean Project said it uncovered a wide pattern of environmental and human rights concerns across the Chinese distant water squid fishing fleet.

One of these ships is the *Zhen Fa 7*. Among the specific pieces of evidence that the petition highlights includes Outlaw Ocean's analysis of recruitment contracts, interviews with Indonesian crewmembers on the vessel, supply chain tracing, and eyewitness accounts.

Through the investigation, the Outlaw Ocean Project found that the *Zhen Fa 7* uses forced labor of Indonesian migrant workers to harvest squid, it said. The Outlaw Ocean Project said it identified multiple indicators of forced labor onboard the *Zhen Fa 7*, including deceptive recruitment, isolation, physical violence, wage

withholding, and more.

The Human Trafficking Legal Center is a non-profit dedicated to protecting victims of trafficking by connecting survivors with pro bono legal representation.

The Outlaw Ocean Project's investigation of forced labor in the seafood supply chain first appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine Oct. 9 after a four-year investigation by the nonprofit group that implicates some of the largest seafood suppliers and retailers in North America and Europe, alleging they are distributing and selling seafood produced in China using Uyghur forced labor.

Following publication of the investigation, US supermarket giant Albertsons stopped purchasing certain products produced in China and supplied by Canadian seafood company High Liner.

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Correction: a previous version of this story said the petition submitted by The Human Trafficking Legal Center contained the phrase “reasonable but not conclusive.” (Copyright)

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