



Business/Economy

Trident Seafoods finds doing business in China requires watchdogging processors

By Hal Bernton for the Anchorage Daily News

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For more than 20 years, Trident Seafoods has maintained offices in China, where the company hires contractors to perform labor-intensive tasks such as removing pin bones from the fillets of Alaska pink and chum salmon.

Seattle-based Trident is a fisheries giant with a fleet of catcher boats and a network of U.S. shore plants. Its presence in China reflects that nation's role as a global processing hub.

In the aftermath of a searing investigative series [published in October by The New Yorker](#), Trident chief executive officer Joe Bundrant is calling for more scrutiny of China's seafood companies by those who do business there.

The journalism nonprofit [The Outlaw Ocean Project](#) — in articles authored by Ian Urbina — chronicled brutal working conditions on Chinese vessels. The project also found evidence of forced labor by more than 1,000 Uyghur and other ethnic minorities in some shoreside operations that appeared to be missed by firms hired by international companies to conduct social audits.

The Outlaw Ocean Project [website](#) lists 357 vessels and 26 Chinese processors linked to human rights, labor or environmental crimes and concerns.

[\[Alaska congressional delegation steps up efforts to shut down U.S. imports of Russian seafood processed in China\]](#)

The website also details 98 international importers and 239 buyers ranging from grocery stores to restaurants to food service companies that have ties to seafood produced by these Chinese operations. Trident was not listed as one of those enterprises.

“As an industry, this is unacceptable. We must do better,” Trident CEO Bundrant wrote in a commentary in Intrafish, an international seafood industry publication.

Trident employs more than 40 people, and a significant part of their work involves oversight, including conducting their own audits to try to ensure Chinese contracts meet international standards and Trident's corporate social responsibility standards.

“Investing substantial resources and conducting on-the-ground audits across supply chains is standard practice in other industries that rely on foreign manufacturing and processing. It should be standard practice in the seafood industry as well,” Bundrant wrote in the commentary.

Trident corporate social responsibility standards call for people to “be treated with dignity and respect” in a workplace free from “harassment, discrimination, bullying and retaliation.” In China, Trident has found that the “vast majority of production facilities” cannot meet the corporate governance standards, according to a Trident statement released to the Anchorage Daily News, so the company “must vet many more suppliers that we accept.”

Many potential contractors have refused to allow access to the full site and living quarters, and thus did not get hired by Trident to supply seafood. Another supplier working with Trident was terminated for failing to improve problems uncovered in an audit, according to the statement.

Some of the companies that Trident opted not to hire were flagged in The Outlaw Ocean Project, according to Trident.

Trident relies on China for processing jobs that have been difficult to get done in Alaska. Head and gutted salmon, as well as small amounts of Alaska-caught Pacific cod, pollock, rockfish, flounder, hake and black cod, are shipped to China. Much of this seafood, once further processed, is then exported back to the United States or Europe, while some is sold in China.

Other U.S. fishing companies, including trawl operations that target flatfish off Alaska, also send seafood to China for processing. In 2022, the United States exported 214,467 metric tons of frozen fish to China, according to the U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service.

Russian fleets have a much heavier reliance on Chinese processors. They shipped more than 886,000 metric tons of frozen fish there in 2022, much of it pollock and cod that is then exported to international markets.

