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Press Release

Smith-cosponsored bill combats forced labor on Chinese ships **Stop Illegal Fishing Act heads to House floor**

Washington, Dec 3, 2025



Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) speaks at the House Foreign Affairs Committee's markup session on December 3, 2025.

Comprehensive legislation cosponsored by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)—the bipartisan *Stop Illegal Fishing Act* ([HR 6338](#))—was today approved by the House Foreign Affairs Committee during their [markup session](#) and is now headed to the full House for its consideration.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY), would impose sanctions upon foreign vessels or individuals that engage in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing).

During the markup, Smith—who, in 2023, chaired a Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) hearing entitled [“From Bait to Plate—How Forced Labor in China Taints America's Seafood Supply Chain”](#)—spoke in favor of the legislation, describing how China utilizes forced labor on their ships to cheaply and quickly process and package large volumes of seafood for international distribution—including and especially to the United States.

Citing expert testimony from the [hearing](#), Smith recalled Ian Urbina's [four-year investigation](#), which revealed that 357 of the 751 Chinese squid fleets studied—nearly half—had serious concerns tied to forced labor.

“China's fleet is filled to overflowing with forced labor,” said Smith, who has chaired more than 108 congressional hearings on human rights abuses in China. “On the fishing boats, as well as in the processing plants, China uses forced labor to undersell competitors. They have very, very small amounts of cost associated with the people around the ships.

“On the open seas, cut off from contact with the land, harsh and very cruel punishment is meted out to laborers, who are treated as slaves—wages are withheld. Captive peoples, especially the Uyghurs, are often conscripted onto these boats,” continued the China policy expert.

Smith then went on to discuss how North Korea exploits its women by forcing them to process the fish caught on Chinese fleets. The North Korean government receives significant compensation from China for these “services,” which is then used to fund their military machine.

Disturbingly, Smith noted, the United States government has also benefited from China's IUU fishing: “Here's the kicker—the United States government has been subsidizing this barbaric behavior.

“Our commissaries are going with the best price, and so often, the fish that lands in those commissaries is tainted with forced labor,” stated the senior lawmaker.

“We've got to stop our complicity in this forced labor, and our purchase and procurement of those products made with forced labor. I, along with my colleagues on the Commission, will continue to write and ask and call that [the Trump administration] stops our complicity in this, and I do hope that this legislation passes,” concluded Smith.



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