



US lawmaker Cindy Hyde-Smith wants to ban seafood imports from China, joining a growing list of lawmakers in the United States demanding a ban. Photo: Cindy Hyde-Smith

## Growing number of US lawmakers demanding ban on seafood imports from China

Calls are growing louder for import bans from groups that include Mississippi catfish and shrimp producers.

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By [Rachel Sapin](#) 

More US lawmakers are asking for a ban on seafood imports from China, pointing to what they say is a growing problem with forced labor as well as illegal fishing connected to products that are being sold in the the United States.

Last week US Republican senators Cindy Hyde-Smith, Rick Scott and Tom Cotton introduced the [Ban China’s Forbidden Operations in the Oceanic Domain \(C-FOOD\) Act](#), which they said "would stop imports of Chinese seafood and aquaculture products, sanction companies that import Chinese seafood, and place tariffs on countries that facilitate the shipment on the seafood."

“It’s past time we hold China accountable for its persistent violation of sovereign waters and its shameless use of slave labor to dominate the aquaculture market with unsafe, chemical-ridden products," said Senator Hyde-Smith.

"These unfair and unethical practices have disadvantaged Mississippi catfish and shrimp producers for far too long, which is why I support this bill to ban US imports of such tainted products until China changes its ways,"

In August Sen. Hyde-Smith, who is from Mississippi, where a good portion of US wild shrimp is harvested, inserted language [into a committee report](#) for the Senate Appropriations Act 2024 that targets seafood marketing efforts.

"The committee continues to be concerned with the lack of a level playing field for US seafood industry," she wrote. "The committee is concerned that recent surges in shrimp imports have flooded the US market and overwhelmed domestic shrimp inventories to the point that US shrimp processors no longer purchase domestic products."

Lawmakers have piled on the requests for a seafood import ban on China following a detailed [investigation from the nonprofit Outlaw Ocean Project](#) published earlier this year in *The New Yorker* magazine.

The investigation revealed evidence of forced labor of Uyghurs workers transferred from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to seafood processing factories in the Shandong province of China that have supplied US companies as well as the US government.

The reasons behind the calls for trade action are varied, but generally focus on Alaska pollock and farmed shrimp imports from China.

In August, Alaska lawmaker Mary Peltola joined other US lawmakers across the country in forming the "American Seafood Caucus" to intensify the government's effort to curtail imports of seafood from Russia and China.

The Congressional caucus said it is providing "a forum for seafood policy champions to find common ground and ensure that healthy, domestically produced, seafood doesn’t take a backseat to foreign products that often don’t uphold our quality and sustainability standards, or may be illegally subsidized by foreign governments."

In November, US House Rep. Christopher Smith of New Jersey and Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon called on US retail giant Costco to provide to "justify the sale of seafood caught and processed by companies in the People’s Republic of China (PRC)."

Also in November, US Senator from Alaska Dan Sullivan suggested that a ban on Russia-origin seafood reprocessed in China and sold in the US market might be close to becoming a reality.

Sullivan, who gave a scathing indictment earlier this summer of Democratic Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey's failure to sign on to a bill closing a loophole allowing Russian seafood to make its way into the US market via China despite a ban on imports of seafood from Russia, suggested the measure now has Markey's support.

In October, leading Canada-based seafood supplier High Liner Foods cut ties with Yantai Sanko Fisheries, citing the investigation.

The Outlaw Ocean Project investigation has US and European seafood buyers and retailers re-examining their supply chains. The companies investigated include 26 Chinese processors, 98 importers and 241 grocery stores, with retail powerhouses such as Walmart and Costco implicated. (Copyright)

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