

Processing

# NGOs turn up heat on Trident, Sysco, High Liner over forced labor allegations

The companies pledged to investigate their supply chains following a sweeping investigation from the nonprofit Outlaw Ocean Project.



The Outlaw Ocean Project revealed evidence of forced labor of Uyghurs workers transferred from the Xinjiang Uyghur region to seafood processing factories in the Shandong province of China that have supplied US companies as well as the US government. (Photo: Shutterstock)

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A group of NGOs is asking major seafood companies, foodservice distributors and retailers to provide details on what they are doing to address allegations of forced labor in their supply chains highlighted in a headline-grabbing Outlaw Ocean Project investigation last year.

On Friday, the group sent letters to Sysco, Trident Seafoods, Ahold Delhaize, Lidl, Albertsons, Metro, Aldi South Group, Carrefour, Cité Marine, High Liner Foods, Nichirei, Nomad Foods and Young's Seafood, Krysta Bismnauth, senior advocacy officer for the US-based Freedom United, one of 18 NGOs who names appear on the letter, confirmed to IntraFish.

Sysco, High Liner and Trident Seafoods are among the companies that pledged to investigate their supply chains following an investigation by the nonprofit [Outlaw Ocean Project published in \*The New Yorker\* magazine](#) in October. The investigation alleged key US companies were importing and distributing seafood produced in China through the use of forced labor.

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

In January, Sysco [terminated its contract](#) and relationship with China-based processing plant Shandong Haidu following the investigation.

The [Outlaw Ocean Project connected Sysco](#) to at least 20 vessels and six processors and at least three buyers connected to alleged forced labor in China.

Sahnon Mutschler, senior director for external communications at Sysco, confirmed to IntraFish on Friday afternoon that the company had received the letter, but declined to comment. She did, however, provide a Sysco [web page](#) set up to address questions about the company's human rights policies.

On the page, Sysco states its commitment to the safe and fair treatment of workers.

It also lists actions the company is taking to protect workers, including working with third-party providers to review and strengthen human rights compliance; launching a pilot program to expand its use of software to track its suppliers' social responsibility audits; and expanding the period of time within which unannounced audits may occur from 30 days to 90 days.

In February Trident Seafoods [cut ties with a Chinese processor](#) that has been accused of using forced labor from North Korea at its facility.

Last year, High Liner stopped working with Yantai Sanko Fisheries after Outlaw Ocean connected the company to [the use of Uyghur forced labor in China to produce seafood](#).

## Provide updates

In the letter, the NGOs asked the companies to provide updates on the due diligence conducted to identify whether direct Chinese suppliers or sub-suppliers are using, or at risk of using, Uyghur or North Korean forced labor and to provide preliminary findings or outcomes from these investigations.

IntraFish has reached out to Trident Seafoods and High Liner Foods for comment.

In March, High Liner Foods CEO Paul Jewer, [speaking at the IntraFish Seafood Leadership Forum](#), said the company was investing resources into its monitoring efforts.

High Liner and Trident Seafoods are among the companies that have staff on the ground in China, Jewer and Trident Seafoods CEO Joe Bundrant said at the event, which is critical to cracking down on violations.

"The third party auditors are only part of the solution," Jewer said.

The NGOs listed on the [the letter](#) sent to Sysco and the other companies include the Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG), Freedom United, The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL), The Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR), Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL), Human Trafficking Legal Center, Humanity United, International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR), and several other.

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