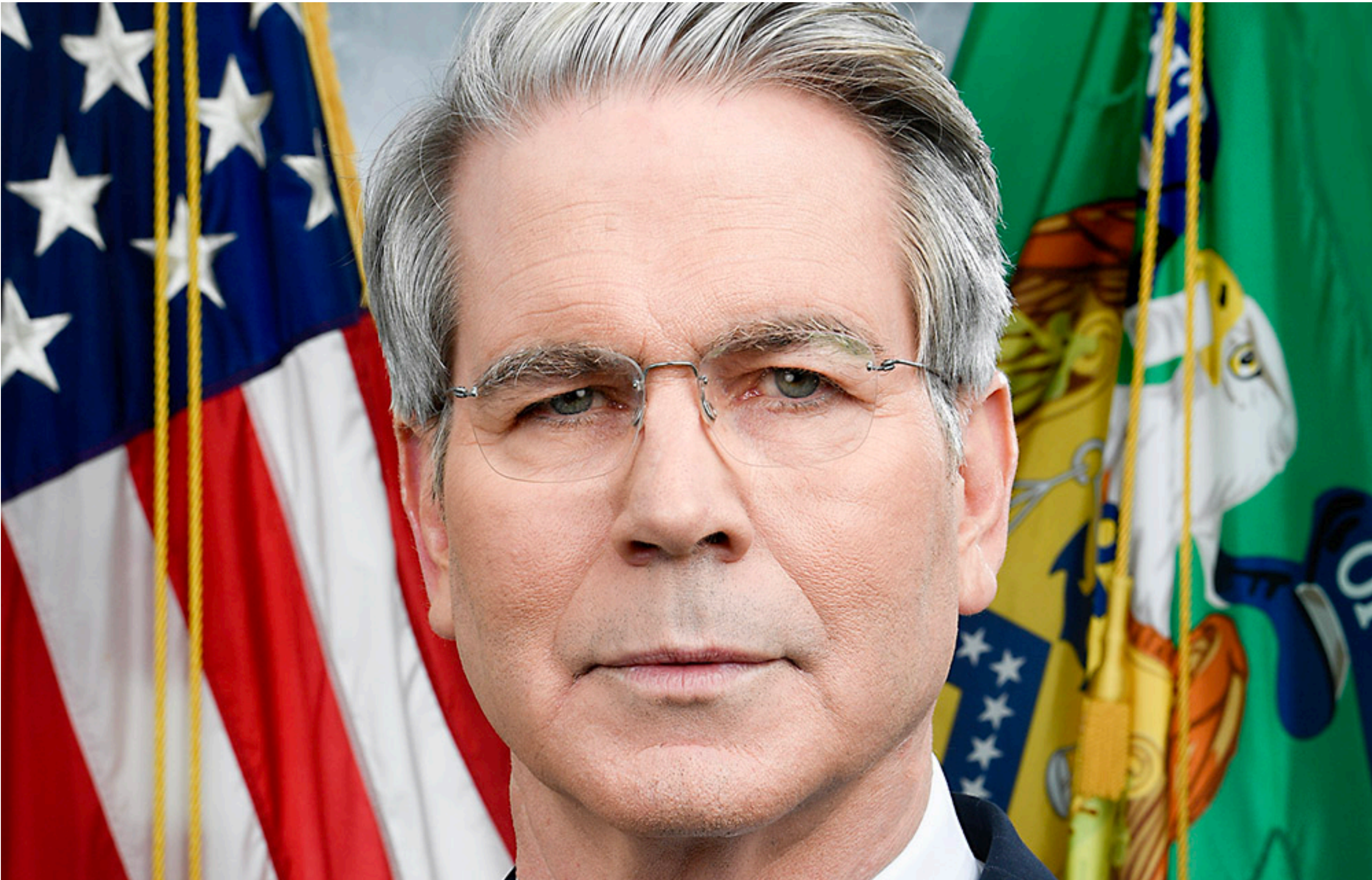


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US senators call for sanctions on vessels that support China’s distant water fishing fleet



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U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent | Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Treasury

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A handful of U.S. senators have asked the Department of the Treasury to issue sanctions on vessels that support China’s distant water fishing fleet, continuing a push from U.S. lawmakers to limit China’s commercial fishing and seafood sectors.

“The Chinese Communist Party is using its global distant-water fleet to conduct ecocide across at least three continents in both hemispheres. They kill endangered species by the hundreds and sharks, whales, and dolphins by the thousands, and have destroyed tens of thousands of acres of coral reefs,” U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) said in a statement. “Their fleet uses coerced laborers, who are subjected to physical abuse, malnutrition, overwork, and withheld pay. They could not conduct these activities without supply ships, including reefers, tankers, and floating bases. The U.S. should bolster our Maritime Domain Awareness capabilities to identify these vessels, and then we should use every available option to sanction and disrupt them.”

In a 23 July letter to Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, nine senators called on the federal government to blacklist reefer carriers, bunker tankers, and floating bases that support China’s distant water fishing fleet, which they claim supports illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing at a massive scale.

“Chinese trawl fleets ravage fish stocks in every corner of the world’s oceans without regard for any other users or future generations. These fleets also engage in gross human rights abuses, including utilizing slave labor,” U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) said in a release. “We are urging Secretary Bessent to deploy the numerous Treasury Department tools and designations available to aggressively sanction these support vessels and dismantle the Chinese Communist Party’s hub-and-spoke IUU fishing scheme. Doing so will enhance the sustainability of our oceans and help support America’s and Alaska’s hard-working fishermen and our many coastal fishing communities.”

U.S. lawmakers have increased criticism of the Chinese commercial fishing and seafood sector since 2023, when the Outlaw Ocean Project began releasing [a series of investigative reports](#) highlighting force labor and other labor abuses in the distant water fishing fleet and in processing plants in mainland China. Other organizations have also documented labor violations and conservation concerns with China’s distant water fleet. U.S. legislators have used those allegations to bolster their calls for a ban on Chinese seafood and sanctions on the country’s distant water fleet. In March, the Senate [passed the Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvest \(FISH\) Act](#), which would establish a blacklist of vessels banned from U.S. waters due to their participating in IUU fishing.

In addition to Cruz and Sullivan, the letter was signed by U.S. Senator Andy Kim (D-New Jersey), U.S. Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas), U.S. Senator Chris Coons (D-Delaware), U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi), U.S. Senator Todd Young (R-Indiana), U.S. Senator Rick Scott (R-Florida), and U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-Tennessee).

The latest missive follows shortly after the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) penned a letter to U.S. President Donald Trump demanding [a ban on seafood caught or processed by China](#).

“The reason is simple. Chinese seafood is too often produced through forced labor and enters our market at prices honest American fishermen cannot match. That is not competition. It is abuse shipped into the United States,” the CECC letter states.



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