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# Bill would require US government to only purchase domestic seafood for school lunches

Nathan Strout published in [Supply & Trade](#)

In 2023, the Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers claimed that roughly half of the fish sticks served in U.S. public schools were processed in China | Photo courtesy of bofotolux/Shutterstock

**A** U.S. lawmaker has introduced legislation requiring the federal government to only purchase domestically produced seafood for school lunches and other federal programs.

“In Louisiana, seafood is a cornerstone of our economy and a way of life. My Buy American Seafood Act would ensure that taxpayer-funded seafood is sourced from American fishermen and processors, protecting taxpayers from subsidizing foreign countries or adversaries like China,” U.S. Representative Julia Letlow (R-Louisiana) said in a release.

The Buy American Seafood Act is the latest legislative effort to bar the U.S. government from purchasing foreign-produced seafood, as lawmakers push to insulate the domestic fishing sector from foreign competitions. According to NOAA Fisheries, roughly 80 percent of seafood consumed by Americans is imported.

“I am fighting to stop heavily subsidized, often-contaminated foreign seafood from undercutting our American producers – including those who harvest the finest Louisiana seafood from the Gulf of America. By prioritizing American seafood in federal purchases, we can deliver nutritious, high-quality products to families across the country,” Letlow said.

Letlow said her legislation would apply to federal child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) claims that the seafood it purchases is domestically sourced, a 2023 Outlaw Ocean Project investigation found that much of the seafood the government purchased was processed in China. At the time, the Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers claimed that roughly half of the fish sticks served in U.S. public schools were processed in China.

“USDA requires that our seafood products be sourced in U.S. waters by U.S. flagged vessels and produced in U.S. establishments approved by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Seafood Inspection Program. USDA ensures this requirement is met by conducting pre and post-production, on site audits,” the department told the Outlaw Ocean Project in response.

U.S. lawmakers have since made multiple pushes to stop foreign seafood from being distributed for school lunches; the Senate approved an amendment banning the government from buying Russian or Chinese seafood for school lunches.

“American children deserve nutritious seafood proudly produced right here under stringent U.S. food safety standards and enforcement. Congresswoman Letlow’s bill delivers exactly that, and in doing so, it supports America’s coastal economies and fishing families,” Southern Shrimp Alliance Director Blake Price said in a statement. “Ensuring U.S. funds deliver healthy U.S. seafood through nutritional programs is a win for our children, fishermen, and coastal economies. We commend Representative Letlow for her leadership on this issue and urge the swift passage of this commonsense bill.”

The Buy American Seafood Act is backed by the Southern Shrimp Alliance, the Louisiana Shrimp Association, Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

“I applaud Congresswoman Letlow for supporting Louisiana’s aquaculture and fishers. This will strengthen our ability to maintain a viable domestic seafood market,” Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Mike Strain said in a release.

The U.S. Department of Defense is already restricted from purchasing most foreign fisheries products under the Berry Amendment. The amendment requires the government to only purchase seafood harvested from U.S.-flagged vessels or from U.S. waters. It also requires all processing to take place in the U.S. or on U.S.-flagged vessels.

Last year, U.S. Representative Nancy Mace (R-South Carolina) introduced legislation that would eliminate any exemptions for seafood products under the Berry Amendment.

## About the Author

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