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Bipartisan group of lawmakers push Biden to do more on IUU fishing

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Representatives Jared Huffman (D-California) and Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona) spearheaded a bipartisan letter calling for President Biden to do more to tackle IUU fishing | Photo courtesy of United States Congress

A bipartisan group of lawmakers from the U.S. House of Representatives has sent a letter to U.S. President Joe Biden urging him and the administration to take increased action against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

[The letter](#), sent by House Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-California) and House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona), was signed by 26 members of the U.S. House of Representatives. It calls for the Biden administration to use new authorities granted it by the National Defense Authorization Act, and the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act.

While the letter commended the administration’s push to fight IUU and its stance – outlined in a 2022 National Security Memo – it also pushed for more involvement in the fight against IUU from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and NOAA, including an expansion of the seafood import monitoring program (SIMP), [which the agency rejected in November 2023](#).

“Full expansion of SIMP and full implementation of the IUU-related provisions enacted in the NDAA in December 2022 will further position NOAA and its partner agencies to identify and address risky seafood imports,” the letter said. “The challenge lies not in the effectiveness of catch documentation and traceability requirements but rather in their inconsistent application to all imports. The ineffectiveness of SIMP is due to its limited application, particularly concerning species coverage, and it is imperative to enhance its implementation and broaden its scope to encompass a wider array of species.”

Huffman has been an outspoken advocate for the expansion of SIMP, and was highly critical of NOAA withdrawing its proposal to expand the program.

“The institutional, cultural, bureaucratic resistance to seriously confronting the scourge of IUU fishing is shameful and inexcusable,” Huffman told SeafoodSource at the time.


The latest letter from lawmakers highlights reporting by Ian Urbina and the Outlaw Ocean Project, citing the organization’s multiple publications on the presence of forced, Uyghur, and North Korean labor in the seafood supply chain. Beginning [with a report in October](#) that revealed extensive evidence seafood processed in China using Uyghur labor was making its way to consumers in the U.S., the Outlaw Ocean Project recently released a new report on the presence of [North Korean labor in Chinese seafood processing](#), with products again making it to U.S. consumers.

“Recent reporting has revealed extensive human rights abuses in China’s seafood supply chain, including slavery and numerous other labor abuses on fishing boats at sea and in seafood processing plants on land,” the letter states. “Although this reporting is focused on China’s role in IUU fishing and forced labor, these are interconnected global problems that require a whole-of-government approach from the United States.”

The letter calls on the Biden administration to use its authority to take a “whole of government” approach on the issue of IUU, and said that if action on the part of the U.S. Congress is needed, the signatories “stand ready to engage on the issue.”

The letter adds on to multiple calls from lawmakers to increase the government’s [scrutiny of Chinese seafood](#) or [even outright ban](#) the import of seafood from China. The Outlaw Ocean reports also prompted an NGO to [file a Magnitsky sanctions recommendation](#) against the Chinese processors named in the report, a move that requires the government to respond by law.

Both the reports also [prompted companies to cut ties](#) with the [Chinese companies implicated](#) by Outlaw Ocean.



About the Author

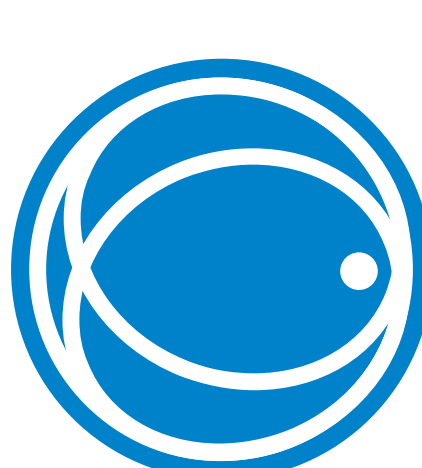
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