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US Department of Homeland Security adds seafood to list of priorities in Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act



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Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas | Photo courtesy of lev radin/Shutterstock

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in its role as the chair of the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force (FLETF), has added seafood to its list of high-priority sectors for enforcement of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA).

The UFLPA was established in 2021, and makes importing goods produced with Uyghur labor or labor from China’s Xianjiang province illegal. The DHS’s addition of seafood – alongside aluminum and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) – mark the first additions to the list of high-priority sectors under the act since 2022.

In [its announcement](#), the DHS said the three industries were identified as at higher risk of forced labor or state labor transfers of Uyghurs or other ethnic minorities from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

“Forced labor is a form of modern slavery, and the Department of Homeland Security is committed to eradicating it from our supply chains,” Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas said. “The updated Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act Strategy and new high-priority sectors for enforcement announced today reflect the evolving and expanding scope of those who seek to circumvent the law and profit off the exploitation of abused people.”

Companies exporting seafood to the U.S. under review by the FLETF are subject to enforcement actions, such as inclusion on the UFLPA Entity list, export limitations, economic sanctions, and visa restrictions.

“Our Department will continue to work closely with our partners in government and with stakeholders across industry and civil society to lead U.S. efforts to end forced labor by enforcing customs laws, supporting economic fairness, and safeguarding the human rights of all,” Mayorkas said.

The DHS has already added some Chinese seafood companies to the UFLPA Entity list, effectively banning all imports from those companies. In June, [it added Shandong Meijia](#), also known as the Rizhao Meijia Group, as well as its subsidiaries Rizhao Meijia Aquatic Foodstuff and Rizhao Meijia Keyuan Food Co., to the list.

The increased scrutiny of Chinese seafood companies by the DHS comes in the wake of an [Outlaw Ocean Project report](#) that revealed evidence of multiple Chinese processing companies using Uyghur labor. The report showcased evidence of Chinese government-sponsored labor transfer programs that shipped workers from Xinjiang to seafood-processing facilities.

FLETF Chair Robert Silvers said that the addition of new products is part of the DHS’s expanding enforcement of the UFLPA to prevent goods made with forced labor from entering the U.S.


“This will happen through designation of more companies to the UFLPA Entity List, enforcement by [Customs and Border Control] at our ports, a focus on additional industry sectors, and continued engagement with industry and civil society,” Silvers said.

U.S. House representatives Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona) and Jared Huffman (D-California) praised the move, calling it a method of holding the seafood industry accountable for forced labor.

“Thanks to groundbreaking reporting from the Outlaw Ocean Project, we know that human rights violations, including forced labor, are running rampant across the global seafood supply chain,” a joint statement from the lawmakers said. “As the world’s largest importer of seafood, the U.S. has a duty to hold the industry accountable for these unacceptable practices and keep tainted products off American families’ dinner tables. The Biden administration’s work to enforce a higher global standard for the seafood industry is commendable and we look forward to continuing to work with them to keep that momentum going.”

The DHS move was welcomed by NGO Oceana, which said it will pressure seafood processors and importers to better document seafood supply chains – which will in turn help combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

“The Department of Homeland Security should be commended for taking this crucial step to protect American consumers and ensure our seafood isn’t tainted by human rights abuses,” Oceana Illegal Fishing and Transparency Director Max Valentine said. “DHS is stepping up in the fight against forced labor in the seafood supply chain, but they cannot do it alone. From blocking forced labor products in the seafood sector, to maintaining the current ban on Russian seafood, none of the government’s lofty goals are possible without enhanced traceability requirements.”








About the Author


Chris Chase

Editor

Chris Chase is the Portland, Maine-based associate editor of SeafoodSource. Previous...

 cchase@divcom.com





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