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US lawmakers, NGOs continue push against IUU in wake of Outlaw Ocean reporting

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The headquarters of Chishan Group, one of the China-based companies named in the Outlaw Ocean Project report on Uyghur labor in the seafood supply chain | Photo courtesy of the Outlaw Ocean Project

A group of U.S. government representatives, including U.S. House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona), and a pair of Canada-based NGOs are pushing the U.S. and Canadian governments to step up enforcement against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and human rights violations identified in an Outlaw Ocean report.

Outlaw Ocean first published its report on seafood being [processed with Uyghur labor in China making its way into U.S. supply chains in October 2023](#). That report named an array of Chinese companies that allegedly used Uyghur and forced labor when processing seafood.

Since that time, seafood suppliers have [dropped relationships with the Chinese companies](#) named in the report, human rights campaigners [have called for shake-ups](#) of seafood certification schemes, NGOs have [filed requests to place Chinese companies under Magnitsky sanctions](#), and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has added seafood to its [list of priorities in the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#).

Now, Grijalva and a group of bipartisan representatives in the U.S. House have written eight letters to a number of federal agencies requesting more information on what agencies are doing to continue combating IUU fishing and forced labor in the U.S. supply chain.

"IUU fishing threatens domestic seafood production and economic prosperity for Americans," the letter states," Grijalva said. "According to a report by the U.S. International Trade Commission, nearly 11 percent of all U.S. seafood imports, equal to USD 2.4 billion [EUR 2.2 billion] annually, are derived from IUU fishing."

The representatives sent letters to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), NOAA, the U.S. Department of State (State), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-California), Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Ranking Member Melanie Stansbury (D-New Mexico), and U.S. Representative Garret Graves (R-Louisiana) signed all eight letters, while House Natural Resources Committee Chair Bruce Westerman (R-Arkansas) signed the letters sent to CEQ and NOAA.

The lawmakers asked separate questions of each organization to assess how they are responding to the new information from the Outlaw Ocean Project and how agencies like the U.S. Department of State are working with other government agencies to tackle the issue.

"Outlaw Ocean reporting also implicates Chinese seafood suppliers as employing Uyghur Forced Labor. We commend the recent addition of seafood as a high-priority sector for enforcement under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA)," the letter to the U.S. Department of State said. "How will the State Department, in collaboration with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, continue to use the UFLPA to stop the flow of seafood into the United States processed by Uyghur labor?"

The group also asked NOAA for a timeline describing some milestones, what NOAA's revision of its audit procedures may look like, and whether it is assessing its processes under the Seafood Import Monitoring Program.

"We are investigating the failure to address and eliminate IUU fishing and forced labor in the seafood supply chain," the letter states. "Americans deserve access to safe and healthy seafood. As the global leader in seafood importation, the United States must work to uphold the integrity of the entire supply chain, even when operations occur within other countries."


As U.S. lawmakers continue to push the government to increase scrutiny of imports and tackle IUU, two organizations in Canada have submitted legal petitions to Global Affairs Canada to implement targeted sanctions against some of the Chinese companies named in the Outlaw Ocean report.

Human Rights Action Group Co-Founder and President Sarah Teich confirmed to SeafoodSource that the Human Rights Action Group and another NGO submitted the petition requesting the sanctions.

The Human Rights Action Group has already pressured the Canadian government to implement targeted sanctions against certain Chinese companies. In December 2023, [the group submitted the recommendation](#) to implement targeted sanctions against Yantai Sanko Fisheries, Yantai Longwin Food, the Chishan Group, Shandong Meijia Group, Qingdao Tianyuan Aquatic Products, the Rongsense Group, and the Xinjiang Zhongtai Zhihui Modern Service – all companies named in Outlaw Ocean's report.

The new recommendation adds companies to the list, including Shandong Jeikou Fishery Group, Shandong Baoma Fishery Group, Shandong Xinfu Group and its subsidiary Shandong Lanrun Aquatic Products, Bodelong Group and its subsidiary Rongcheng Guangrun Aquatic Food, Jinghai Group, China National Fisheries Corporation and its subsidiaries Yantai New Ocean Aquatic Food and China Aquatic Products Zhoushan Marine Fisheries, Pingtan Marine Enterprise, and Dalian Ocean Fishing Co.

Global Affairs Canada manages the country's diplomatic relations, and the country already has existing sanctions related to certain Chinese companies and Uyghur labor under the country's Special Economic Measures. Those sanctions were levied in 2021 against four Chinese officials – Zhu Hailun, Wang Junzheng, Wang Mingshan, and Chen Minggou – and a Chinese company – Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau.



About the Author

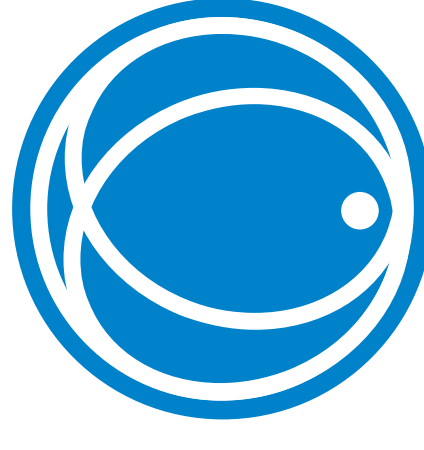
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