

# US Senator Tom Cotton introduces bill to ban Chinese seafood imports

By Nathan Strout  
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U.S. Senator Tom Cotton has introduced legislation that would ban the import of seafood and aquaculture products from China.

“Fishing and aquaculture is yet another industry the Chinese Communist Party is weaponizing for their own gain through blatant abuse and slave labor. This legislation will stop imports of this illicit seafood by imposing real costs on the Chinese government and the companies that aid them,” Cotton said in a statement.

The bill is a response to [an Ocean Outlaw Project report](#) alleging that several Chinese seafood processors used Uyghur labor – illegal under U.S. law – in the production of seafood later exported to the U.S. Some seafood companies [have cut ties with Chinese processors](#) over the [well-documented allegations](#), and other U.S. lawmakers [have been pushing for legislation](#) to address the issues raised in the report.

“Communist China, under Xi’s murderous regime, is on a quest for global domination, building economic power in industries like seafood and aquaculture that are known to use slave labor and other illegal, unreported, and unregulated practices that are pushing American businesses out of business in the process,” U.S. Sen. Rick Scott (R-Florida), a co-sponsor of the bill, said in a statement.

The Ban China’s Forbidden Operations in the Oceanic Domain (C-FOOD) Act would prohibit Chinese seafood imports until the U.S. government can confirm that forced labor is not being used in their production and until the Chinese government ends its practice of subsidizing its fishing fleets. The bill would also require a determination from the U.S. Secretary of Defense that China’s fishing fleet would not be used to invade Taiwan.

Additionally, the legislation would instruct the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury to sanction companies that partake in the transshipment of Chinese seafood.

The Outlaw Ocean Project’s reporting has spurred declarations of outrage from members of Congress. Earlier this week, U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-New Jersey) held a press conference demanding actions against China’s seafood exports. The representative also wrote a letter to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) demanding improved screening of seafood products from China “to ensure compliance with international and domestic trade, safety, and labor standards.”

“Without proper enforcement and stepped-up screening by CBP, seafood products tainted with the use of forced labor from Chinese boats and processing centers will continue entering the U.S. market,” Pallone wrote. “Not only is this a violation of international and U.S. law, but it also causes significant harm to American consumers and our domestic seafood industry.”

U.S. Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Arizona) and U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman (D-California) also [have written a letter to CBP](#) demanding an investigation and action. The legislators [also wrote to NOAA](#) arguing that the traceability requirements of the Seafood Import Monitoring Program can help prevent remove forced labor from U.S. imports and advocated [an expansion and strengthening of that program](#).

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China [held a hearing in October](#) to discuss the allegations of forced labor in China’s seafood industry. The heads of the commission sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security asking the government to investigate the allegations, issue withhold release orders for seafood processors in the Shandong and Liaoning provinces of China, and put companies that use Uyghur labor on the “entity list.”

The Uyghur labor revelations may also bolster efforts by U.S. lawmakers to limit Chinese seafood imports that were introduced prior to the Outlaw Ocean Project’s reporting.

In November, the U.S. Senate passed a provision authored by U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) that would prohibit the U.S. government from purchasing Chinese seafood or Russian seafood processed in China for the National School Lunch Program. Sullivan also is pushing legislation that would ban Russian seafood that is processed in China from being imported to the U.S.

In May, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida) introduced the Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act, which would place further sanctions on Chinese officials “responsible for the ongoing genocide of the Uyghurs.” The legislation would also prevent the U.S. government from purchasing goods or services linked to Uyghur labor.

“The U.S. government has laws on the books to block imports made by slave labor, but enforcement is lacking,” Rubio told the Outlaw Ocean Project, as [reported by Politico](#). “As a result, Americans are unknowingly enriching those responsible for enslaving hundreds of thousands of people. The Biden administration needs to step up and do more to block these imports.”

*Photo courtesy of the U.S. Office of Senator Tom Cotton*



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