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US senators demand ban on Chinese seafood over IUU fishing, forced labor

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



U.S. Senator Katie Britt (R-Alabama) and U.S. Senator Rick Scott (R-Florida) claimed illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in China’s seafood industry is a threat to national security | Photo courtesy of the Office of Senator Katie Britt

A pair of senators from the United States have sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, demanding the federal government issue “the toughest possible sanctions on seafood from China” over human rights violations in its commercial fishing industry.

In the 21 August letter, U.S. Senator Katie Britt (R-Alabama) and U.S. Senator Rick Scott (R-Florida) claimed illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in China’s seafood industry was harmful to U.S. workers and a threat to national security.

“We are writing to ask that you take urgent action against the escalating threat of IUU fishing, a crisis that Communist China has turned into a weapon against American fishermen, our environment, and our national security,” the lawmakers stated in the letter. “The United States must no longer tolerate the exploitation of our markets by regimes that flagrantly violate human rights, ravage our oceans, and destroy American jobs.”

The senators alleged the presence of forced labor, child labor, human trafficking, and dangerous working conditions in the Chinese fishing fleet contributed to the death of more than 100,000 people in the commercial fishing industry every year. Many of the labor violations cited were highlighted in a series of [Outlaw Ocean Project investigations](#) documenting the use of Uyghur and North Korean labor in the Chinese seafood-processing industry, as well as unsafe conditions for laborers in the nation’s fishing fleet.

“Chinese fishing fleets are notorious for their gross human rights abuses, including the use of forced and child labor – often from persecuted minorities like Uyghur Muslims and North Koreans,” the senators said. “These vessels operate with impunity, decimating marine ecosystems and undercutting honest American businesses with artificially low prices. The result: American fishers are driven out of business, and American families are left vulnerable to unsafe, unethically sourced seafood.”

Both Britt and Scott called on Lutnick to fully enforce the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act and ban any seafood from China and other nations that “abuse human rights on the high seas.”

“The United States has powerful tools to fight back. The High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act empowers NOAA to impose severe penalties, including import restrictions and port denials, on nations engaged in IUU fishing,” they said. “Yet, these tools have been underused, allowing Communist China to continue its campaign of economic sabotage and human rights violations.”

In the wake of the Outlaw Ocean Project’s revelations, U.S. lawmakers have proposed several measures to limit or ban Chinese seafood. In 2023, the Senate passed a provision banning the purchase of Russian or Chinese seafood for the country’s National School Lunch Program. Lawmakers also [introduced the Ban China’s Forbidden Operations in the Oceanic Domain \(Ban C-FOOD\) Act](#), legislation that would ban Chinese seafood outright. However, the legislation was never brought up for a vote.

Senators are currently considering [a ban on Chinese seafood in U.S. military dining facilities](#) and requiring the Department of Defense inspector general [to draft a report](#) explaining how the military is working to ensure it is not purchasing seafood from China prohibited under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

“We must protect American jobs, safeguard our environment, and uphold our values by refusing to be complicit in the gross abuses of Communist China,” Britt and Scott said.



About the Author

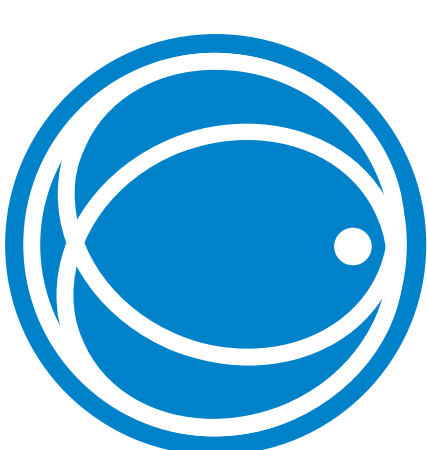
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