

# Chinese officials deny forced labor used in seafood factories

Chinese officials are firmly denying allegations that forced labor is used within the country's seafood processing industry, calling the accusation 'completely fabricated'

By [Louis Harkell](#) | Oct. 18, 2023 14:09 BST



□ Cui He, head of the China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance (CAPPMA). Credit: CAPPMA

Chinese officials are firmly denying allegations that forced labor is used within the country's seafood processing industry, calling the accusation "completely fabricated."

The accusations stem from a recent report by The Outlaw Ocean Project (OOP), which claimed some Chinese seafood processing facilities employ Uyghur Muslims under coercive working conditions tantamount to forced labor. The report prompted several US and European importers to cease shipments from a number of accused Chinese suppliers.

In response, industry body China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance (CAPPMA) said it conducted prompt investigations into the companies in question and contended it found "no evidence of forced labor," according to a statement released Wednesday (Oct. 18).

"Workers from all ethnic groups work in the same conditions, enjoy equal rights and equal pay for equal work," the statement read.

CAPPMA went on to say Chinese processing plants "consistently adhere to the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China and strictly follow the audit requirements of international third parties for safeguarding workers' rights and interests."

CAPPMA officials blasted the forced labor story as "fabricated" and took aim at the media outlets spreading it, though it offered no evidence of this fabrication.

"This is highly irresponsible!" the statement read. "The continuous spread of the news has resulted in some buyers ceasing shipments from Chinese processing plants."

Under Chinese law, the use of Xinjiang workers -- including those deployed via the government labor transfer program -- is legal.

However, according to the US' Uyghur Forced Labour Protection Act, imports to the US of goods produced by Xinjiang ethnic minorities at worksites located inside or outside of Xinjiang are banned.

The UN, human rights organizations and academic experts also agree that since 2018, the Chinese government has systematically subjected Xinjiang's predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities to state-imposed forced labor across the country via labor transfer programs. These use coercive methods in worker enrollment and obstruct the freedom to terminate employment.

CAPPMA's statement emphasized that employees of all backgrounds are protected by a range of labor rights under Chinese law.

"Workers of all ethnic groups enjoy a range of labor rights, including equal employment opportunities, the freedom to choose their profession, fair compensation, and access to vocational skills training," it said. "These principles also apply to employees in aquatic product processing enterprises."

In response to the allegations, CAPPMA invited international organizations and journalists to visit Chinese facilities and judge the labor practices for themselves.

"We hope to promptly eliminate the impact of false allegations on the international fair-trade order for seafood products," the statement said.

OOP said it identified clips uploaded to multiple user accounts on Douyin -- China's equivalent to TikTok -- featuring content that indicated coercion and involuntariness among the Xinjiang ethnic minorities deployed to Shandong seafood processing plants. There is more about this on OOP's [methods page](#).

Earlier this month, some major seafood buyers in the US and Europe suspended shipments from a number of accused Chinese suppliers following the report's publication, dealing a blow to some Chinese processors.

On Friday (Oct. 13), Lund's Fisheries, a Cape May, New Jersey-based harvester and processor of squid, scallops and multiple finfish species, [declared](#) it will not resume working with a Chinese seafood supplier identified in OOP's report.

Lund's was one of a few big names in the US seafood industry last week to make such a pronouncement following the publication in [The New Yorker of the lengthy two-part series produced in collaboration with OOP](#).

Another large US retailer, Albertsons Companies, also said it had dropped two products from High Liner, including branded flounder and yellowfin sole, having been contacted by OOP.

High Liner has also since ceased working with the Chinese supplier accused of employing Uyghur labor.

The investigation has generated so much attention that a joint panel of Congress and White House officials has called a special hearing to learn more about the report, as [reported by Undercurrent News](#).

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