

Joint US Congress, White House panel schedule hearing to discuss report on use of forced labor in Chinese seafood

'This hearing will continue the [Congressional-Executive Commission's] efforts to ensure that [Chinese] goods and products made with forced labor do not enter US markets'

By [Jason Huffman](#) | Oct. 13, 2023 10:04 BST



📷 The US Capitol building in Washington, D.C., at night. Credit: f11photo/Shutterstock.com

The special report that shone a spotlight on the Chinese seafood industry's use of forced labor, including Uyghurs, has gained the attention of both the US Congress and the White House.

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) announced Thursday (Oct. 12) that it would be holding a hearing in less than two weeks -- on Oct. 24 -- to "continue the CECC's efforts to ensure that [Chinese] goods and products made with forced labor do not enter US markets."

The panel, created by legislation in October 2000, is made up of nine US senators, nine US representatives and five senior administration officials appointed by the president. Co-chaired by representative Christopher Smith, a New Jersey Republican, and senator Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat, its job is to monitor human rights and the development of the rule of law in China.

Other members of the commission include Alaska senator Dan Sullivan, a Republican, who already has introduced legislation aimed at blocking Russian seafood from entering the US after it was processed in China.

"US imports of seafood caught or processed with forced labor may be prohibited under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act [UFLPA], the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act and other laws," reads a preview of the hearing, which is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. EST.

"Nevertheless, the US government, major grocery chains and restaurants continue to purchase seafood caught and processed using forced labor in China. This hearing will continue the CECC's efforts to ensure that PRC goods and products made with forced labor do not enter US markets. Witnesses will provide testimony about the human rights abuses on board China's IUU [illegal, unregulated and unreported] fishing fleet, the seafood supply chains tainted by forced labor in China, and the exposure of the US government and American consumers to these supply chains. Witnesses will also provide recommendations for US action."

The [Outlaw Ocean Project](#) series, which was published in conjunction with *The New Yorker* on Oct. 9, provided haunting details about crew members being held captive, beaten and suffering from malnutrition aboard vessels in [China's distant water fishing fleet](#) as well as a thorough accounting of the Chinese program used to enlist and transport a large number of Uyghurs from Xinjiang, in the land-locked, northwestern part of China, over 1,000 miles to seafood processing plants in Shandong, on the eastern coast.

Several [major US retail chains](#), including Albertsons Companies and Shaw's, and German retailers Aldi and Lidl, have ended their relationships with Chinese processing companies in advance and following the publication of the report.

Albertsons has dropped two products from High Liner Foods involving flounder and yellowfin sole after it was revealed in the report that one of Canada's largest seafood companies was buying from Yantai Sanko Fisheries, a Chinese processor accused of taking on Uyghur workers under the Chinese government's labor transfer program. The United Nations and human rights organizations consider this to be forced labor.

High Liner has dropped Yantai Sanko as a supplier, Jennifer Bell, vice president of corporate communications, told [Undercurrent](#) on Wednesday, Oct. 11.



📷 Still from video uploaded to a Chinese government Douyin account in 2023 depicting a labor transfer organized by the Kashgar authorities. Source: The Outlaw Ocean Project.

Ian Urbina, the author of the story, is one of three witnesses expected to testify at the hearing. He is the director and founder of the Outlaw Ocean Project, a former 17-year reporter for the *New York Times* and the winner of a Pulitzer Prize.

The commission also expects to hear from Robert Stumberg, a law professor at Georgetown University, and Greg Scarlatoiu, executive director of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. It advises that other witnesses may be called.

Stumberg can be expected to call for stricter enforcement of existing laws. Passed in 2021, the UFLPA declared that all goods produced "wholly or in part" by workers in Xinjiang or by ethnic minorities from the region should be presumed to have involved state-imposed forced labor and are therefore banned from entering the US.

That law is "distinctly powerful," he is quoted in the article as saying.

Rather than primarily relying on advocates or journalists having to prove the existence of forced labor tied to a certain product, the law mandates that suppliers and importers prove that they have no connection to Uyghur labor, the article reports him as saying. The US government has already investigated the working conditions in a variety of other industries, including those for solar panels, auto parts, computer chips, palm oil, sugar and tomatoes.

"Seafood should be next," he said.

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