

Outlaw Ocean video details dark links between China squid player, EU, US buyers

Chishan Group -- China's largest private player in the squid industry -- was linked to illegal fishing in North Korean waters and the fleet dropping off dead crew in Montevideo on a regular basis

By [Neil Ramsden](#) | Dec. 1, 2023 10:45 GMT



📷 Squid being processed in China. Credit: Outlaw Ocean/ Chishan

The latest report from The Outlaw Ocean Project (OOP) has detailed how it tracked squid imported to the US and EU to a Chinese giant connected to various illegal activities.

Its work -- unveiled this fall when *The New Yorker* published some of its findings -- has linked seafood buyers globally to illegal fishing activities and labor by the Muslim Uyghur minority allegedly forcibly displaced from their home province, Xinjiang.

The project's latest video details its investigation of the Chishan Group, the single biggest private player in China's squid industry. Two of its plants -- Rongcheng Haibo Seafood and Shandong Haidu Ocean Product -- process 30% of all squid in China, said Ian Urbina of OOP.

Chishan also processes 17% of all squid imported to the US from China, he said. The company also exports squid to Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, and Spain, including to major distributors like New Jersey's Ruggiero Seafoods and California's Sea Relation.

OOP's "discussion" database, detailing its interactions with companies, gives no responses to its requests for comment from these two named US companies.

"In turn, many of these companies supply major foodservice distributors like Performance Food Group, which sources over 300,000 customer locations."

Chishan owns at least forty fishing ships, some of China's largest processing facilities, and three transshipment refrigeration vessels that carry catch back to shore, said OOP. It is "worth close study because the evidence of ties between its plants and forced labor from Xinjiang region in China is especially strong, and the use of labor from Xinjiang on products exported to the US and EU is forbidden."



📷 Chinese squid fishing. Credit: OOP / Chishan

The video details how Chishan first came to the project's attention when it was tracking Chinese vessels fishing in North Korean waters, contravening international sanctions. They were operating with automatic identification systems switched off and transshipping with other vessels known to be engaging in further illegal activities, it said.

Later, OOP believes it linked Chishan transshipping and support vessels to the Chinese squid fleet operating off the coast of South America. This fleet, it said, disembarked a dead crewmember in Montevideo, Uruguay, every six weeks or so from 2013 to 2021.

Urbina noted several seafood brands, including [Weee!](#), [Pacific American Fish Co](#), and [Lund's Fisheries](#), have already cut ties to certain Chishan plants.

"Over the past year, officials from Haibo and Haidu have repeatedly denied that the plants used Xinjiang labor. The Chishan Group has not engaged."

"The bigger point, however, is that the Chishan Group is not unique. What we found in our investigation was that many seafood companies are tied to a wide variety of similar problems with forced labor or illegal fishing. And, truth be told, the pervasiveness of these problems is why the global seafood industry likely will have to assess how it monitors its supply chains, especially when these supply chains route through China."

Many of the companies identified by OOP's work, including those owned by Chishan, relied on social and marine audits to verify that there was no forced labor or other types of crimes like illegal fishing in the very supply chains that the investigation revealed were tainted by these problems, Urbina said.

"A variety of researchers have shown that such audits are deeply flawed in the best of circumstances (like when they are used in factories on land in countries other than China). The current investigation shows that these audits are even more fraught when conducted on fishing ships or in factories in China, where information and access is so controlled and where journalists, labor inspectors or ocean conservation NGOs are expelled from the country if they critique the government or companies."

You can watch the 20-minute video on Chishan [here](#).

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