

Some European, US seafood buyers dropped Chinese processors accused of forced labor this summer

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By [Louis Harkell](#) | Oct. 12, 2023 16:35 BST



□ The Outlaw Ocean Project, a non-profit focused on reporting abuses within the fishing industry, has published an investigation into the alleged use of forced Uyghur labor transferred from Xinjiang.

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On Monday (Oct. 9), The Outlaw Ocean Project, a non-profit focused on reporting abuses within the fishing industry, [published an investigation](#) into the alleged use of forced Uyghur labor transferred from Xinjiang.

The investigation details evidence of forced labor at Chinese seafood plants in Shandong province, where processors employ thousands of workers in whitefish and squid filleting.

The US bans imports produced with forced labor, which it considers any work conducted under threat of penalties and not voluntarily. Beijing denies any coercion and calls the program job training initiatives.

Among the companies that said they cut ties with the Chinese processors are US supermarket chains Albertsons Companies and Shaw's, and German retailers Aldi and Lidl.

Lidl France told The Outlaw Ocean Project its supplier Cite Marine, which is owned by Japanese seafood giant Nissui, had enforced a temporary suspension of all shipments from Qingdao Tianyuan Aquatic Foodstuff, after the company was informed of the accusations in early July.

Lidl France said the suspension was enacted "as a precaution."

French retailers Carrefour and Casino and UK seafood company Young's Seafood also told The Outlaw Ocean Project they were carrying out internal investigations back in July and August. Auchan did not respond to inquiries from the NGO, while Sysco's French subsidiary Davigel did not follow up on an initial response.

On Wednesday (Oct. 11), *Undercurrent News* reported that Albertsons, one of the largest retailers in the US, had dropped two products from High Liner Foods, one of Canada's largest seafood companies. The retail giant stopped buying High Liner branded flounder and yellowfin sole, having been contacted by The Outlaw Ocean Project in August.

Qingdao Tianyuan's general manager, Nina Yin, sent an email to The Ocean Outlaw Project saying the accusations had led customers to refuse to buy its seafood.

In the email from Aug. 29, Yin said the accusations had "severely impacted our normal business operations... and put the livelihoods of hundreds of our employees' families at risk."

"We hope that satisfy [sic] you and you will cease the spread of negative messages immediately and retract them," Yin told the NGO in a subsequent email.

The Ocean Outlaw Project said it has publicly accessible documentation that demonstrates Chinese seafood processors' use of labor from Xinjiang.

In Qingdao Tianyuan's case, this includes multiple state media reports describing the government's involvement in transferring workers from Xinjiang to the company, and including photos of the transfers.

The authenticated footage confirms the presence of Xinjiang workers at Qingdao Tianyuan from as early as 2018 to as recently as May 2023, the group said.

"We have also obtained footage showing Xinjiang workers at Qingdao Lian Yang Aquatic Products Co. Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Qingdao Tianyuan, as early as April 2022 and as recently as April 2023," The Outlaw Ocean Project said in an email to Qingdao Tianyuan.

Yin defended Qingdao Tianyuan's labor practices in subsequent emails, saying the company was privately owned and did not participate in any government labor transfer programs.

The read the full email exchange, [click here](#).

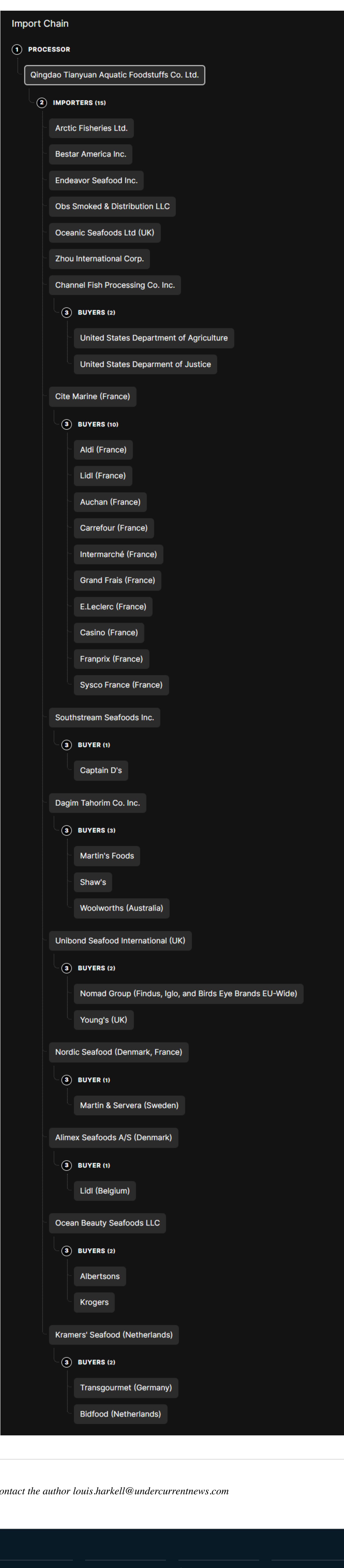
On Wednesday, High Liner [confirmed to Undercurrent News](#) it had dropped Yantai Sanko Fisheries -- another accused Chinese company -- as a supplier.

Jennifer Bell, vice president of corporate communications, said in a written statement that this was "out of an abundance of caution, and in light of the concerning evidence and allegations included in this [Outlaw Ocean Project] article."

"High Liner Foods is working with alternate suppliers to ensure that we minimize the impact on our supply chain," Bell said.

After hearing of the allegations brought forward by Outlaw Ocean, High Liner had Yantai Sanko audited again in August 2023, finding no evidence in either audit of the use of forced labor, she said.

To view Qingdao Tianyuan's position in the seafood supply chain, view the diagram by The Outlaw Ocean Project below. To view other companies' positions in the supply chain of seafood, [click here](#).



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