

Sysco, Trident among big firms asked for updates on forced labor sourcing investigations

'We believe that maintaining a supply chain free from forced labor is not only a legal and ethical imperative, but also crucial for the sustainability of the seafood industry' -- NGO letter to Sysco

By [Jason Huffman](#) | July 15, 2024 17:20 BST



📷 Ian Urbina, founder and director of the Outlaw Ocean Project, testifying at a hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on Oct. 24, 2023. Image is still from video.

Sysco Corp., Trident Seafoods and High Liner Foods are among 13 heavyweight buyers of seafood that've been asked by a coalition of 18 non-governmental organizations to tell them more about the steps they are taking to investigate concerns regarding sourcing from Chinese companies that rely upon forced labor.

The effort relates to reports by the Outlaw Ocean Project (OOP) and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ian Urbina first published by [The New Yorker](#) in October 2023.

The series 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 over 1,000 miles from Xinjiang, in the land-locked, northwestern part of China, to seafood processing plants in Shangdong, on the east coast.

Subsequent reports detailed the abuse of North Korean laborers.

The reports have led to congressional hearings and multiple pleadings with the president Joe Biden administration to step up the pressure on seafood imports from China that involved forced labor, as reported by [Undercurrent News](#).

In the latest action, a long list of NGOs, including Freedom United, the Transitional Justice Working Group and the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, have launched a coordinated campaign that involves sending letters to more than a dozen companies to ask them about their practices.

One letter sent to US food distribution giant Sysco, a copy of which was shared with [Undercurrent](#), reminds the company of the commitment it made to investigate its sourcing practices. It asks Sysco to provide its preliminary findings or outcomes and examples of steps it has taken to cease relying on suppliers or sub-suppliers participating in forced labor programs.

"We believe that maintaining a supply chain free from forced labor is not only a legal and ethical imperative, but also crucial for the sustainability of the seafood industry," stated the letter, which gave the company three weeks to respond.

Sysco, Trident and High Liner all reported suspending business with a large processing firm in China, Dalian Haiqing Food Co., in January 2024 over the OOP series, as reported earlier by [Undercurrent](#).

According to trade records, Trident was buying from Haiqing as recently as December. The company was "the consignee for shipments of seafood, including pollock," from the Chinese company between October 2017 and December 2023.

Other companies targeted by the NGOs include, according to sources: Ahold Delhaize, Lidl, Albertsons, Metro, Aldi South Group, Carrefour, Cite Marine, Nichirei Seafoods, Nomad Foods and Young's Seafood.

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