

US pollock sector calls for big changes in wake of report on Chinese forced labor

'No one who has read *The New Yorker's* gut-wrenching new reporting on human rights abuses in the Chinese seafood sector can think that the status quo is acceptable' -- Stephanie Madsen, At-sea Processors Association

By [Jason Huffman](#) | Oct. 17, 2023 18:37 BST



□ Wild Alaska pollock. Photo courtesy of Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers.

The US' wild Alaska pollock industry has responded to the Outlaw Ocean Project report published by *The New Yorker* by proposing several new requirements and stiffer enforcement of trade-related policies across the US and European Union.

The Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers (GAPP), the group that acts as a marketing agency for US pollock producers, in [a blog post published Monday](#) (Oct. 16), said its members were "horrified" by the report. GAAP earlier fought to make sure that only its products could be called "Alaska pollock" and now hopes to secure the same kinds of protections in Europe.

"For three years, GAAP has been tirelessly advocating for the name protection of wild Alaska pollock in Europe, so that consumers there can enjoy the same transparency consumers in the US are now accustomed to," wrote GAAP CEO Craig Morris. "Current laws and practices in Europe do not make clear the origin of fish and, in some cases, lead to misleading labeling. Nevertheless, GAPP will continue efforts to advocate for proper labeling for wild Alaska pollock with European regulators.

"Of equal importance, GAPP will also continue work with key customers in Europe to work towards wholly transparent on-pack labeling, ensuring consumers can make truly informed buying decisions," he said.

As reported by *Undercurrent News*, the two-part series published Monday by the group Outlaw Ocean Project has stirred a considerable amount of reaction from the US seafood industry. One article provided haunting details article about crew members being held captive, beaten and suffering from malnutrition aboard vessels in China's distant water fishing fleet.

A second article provided a thorough account 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 Shangdong, on the eastern coast.

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), a joint panel made up of US senators, representatives and administration staff, announced Thursday (Oct. 12) that it would hold a hearing on Oct. 24 to focus on the report, as reported by *Undercurrent*.

On Thursday (Oct. 12), Stephanie Madsen, executive director of the At-sea Processors Association (APA), the trade association that represents Alaska's catchers and processors of pollock, also made known her feelings about the recent Outlaw Ocean Project report in a blog post on [Medium](#).

"No one who has read *The New Yorker's* gut-wrenching new reporting on human rights abuses in the Chinese seafood sector can think that the status quo is acceptable," she wrote.

"These human rights abuses should be intolerable for all of us," she said. "Equally intolerable is a system that allows seafood products harvested and processed under these conditions to enter global commerce."

APA is calling for the adoption of a more uniform and robust system of import controls by seafood-importing nations, Madsen advised. She noted how the European Union, in 2010, implemented a new Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Regulation, which requires a catch certificate to accompany all seafood imports. The system also empowers regulators to ban seafood imports from flag states that do not cooperate in efforts to counter IUU activity.

"It is past time for US authorities to follow Europe's lead and require a flag state catch certificate to accompany all seafood imports," she wrote. "Linking this system to [the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's] biennial IUU report will give US authorities far greater leverage to secure improvements in counter-IUU measures by our trading partners. If this innovation is coupled with closer US-EU cooperation on seafood supply chain reforms and counter-IUU measures, there is an opportunity to force necessary changes in seafood supply chains covering a significant portion of global seafood consumption.

"Other major seafood importing nations, such as Japan, could hopefully be encouraged to follow suit," she added.

A second step that Madsen has proposed is for US authorities to ensure that the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is being fully enforced for seafood.

"If investigative journalists have been able to identify the use of Uyghur laborers at specific seafood processing plants in China, US Customs and Border Protection authorities should be able to do so as well," she wrote. "It is already illegal for any such product to enter the United States market. We need comprehensive implementation of this landmark law with respect to seafood imports immediately."

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