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# Responses flood in to reports alleging problems in India's shrimp industry

 Cliff White published in [Supply & Trade](#)


A shrimp-peeling shed in India | Photo courtesy of the Outlaw Ocean Project

Separate reports from the [Corporate Accountability Lab](#), the [Associated Press](#), and the [Outlaw Ocean Project](#) investigating labor and food safety issues in India's shrimp sector have elicited a vociferous response from the seafood industry at large.

Sysco, Great American Seafood, Rich Products, Walmart, Eastern Fish Company, and Nekkanti Sea Foods [issued statements](#) outlining their buying policies and/or addressing particular issues raised by the AP article. Sysco said it has suspended its purchases of shrimp from Nekkanti pending an internal investigation into the company's alleged use of a third-party peeling shed, which is not permitted under Sysco policy. US Foods, Aldi, Costco, Hannaford, Kroger, Stop & Shop, Walmart, and Whole Foods, Red Lobster, and the Cheesecake Factory were also named as buying shrimp from Nekkanti, as listed on Nekkanti's website.

Fellow Indian shrimp processors Devi Fisheries, Apex Frozen Foods, Avanti Feeds, and Sandhya Aqua were named in the CAL report as "generat[ing] profit off of shrimp produced cheaply at the expense of workers and the environment."

The Outlaw Ocean Project [has also published its interactions](#) with companies affiliated with Choice Canning, which include Ahold Delhaize, Aldi, Bloomin' Brands, Dollar General, Family Dollar, H-E-B, HelloFresh, Metro, Price Chopper, Piggly Wiggly, Schnucks, The Fishin' Co., Wakefern, Walmart, and Weis. Choice Canning Vice President of Sales and Procurement Jacob Jose provided an additional response to the report in [an interview with SeafoodSource](#).

Below is a list of additional responses compiled by SeafoodSource in response to the reports.

## Global Seafood Alliance:

The Global Seafood Alliance is aware of and actively investigating recent allegations being made against shrimp producers in India, including those holding Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) certificates.

"We are committed to our mission of promoting responsible practices in the seafood supply chain and take these matters seriously," said GSA Executive Director Wally Stevens said. "BAP requires all certified seafood production facilities – aquaculture farms, hatcheries, feed mills and processing plants – to strictly adhere to robust social accountability, food safety, environmental responsibility, and animal welfare aspects of our global certification standards. Facilities found to have violated BAP standards will have their certifications suspended and potentially revoked."

Credible evidence of a BAP standard violation initiates an investigation, and the procedure is managed by the GSA Program Integrity department with the involvement of specialized and impartial third-party investigators. This process is currently under way to explore the validity of alleged violations that were reported this week by the Associated Press, The Outlaw Ocean Project, and the Corporate Accountability Lab, and to strengthen procedures to help prevent future violations.

The organization stands behind the integrity of its standards and feels that these requirements have meaningful positive impacts, and is constantly evaluating the depth and breadth of its certification portfolio. GSA welcomes collaboration with other organizations to not only review the allegations in India, but to also develop and implement improvements for certification processes.

BAP standards are maintained under a rigorous internationally recognized process that includes an expert technical committee for standard development, a 60-day public comment period where all comments are reviewed and addressed, and approval by a 12- to 15-member Standards Oversight Committee consisting of one-third academia, one-third industry, and one-third NGO experts. Additional detailed information about the BAP standards can be found [here](#).

Assessments are conducted by accredited third-party certification bodies at least once per year. Facilities must meet all standard criteria and correct all non-conformities before certification is granted. GSA monitors FDA import alerts and news reports and investigates all complaints and allegations to safeguard that auditors, certification bodies, and facilities adhere to program requirements. Severe non-conformities and those that are not resolved within a specified timeframe result in suspension from the BAP program.

GSA and its standards have developed over time to address a variety of issues and areas for improvement. The organization is committed to its mission to advance responsible seafood practices through education, advocacy, and third-party assurances that the world's leading retailers, foodservice operators, and all seafood consumers deserve.

## Seafood Exporters Association of India President Pawan Kumar:

[The AP] report contains a number of errors and omissions and leaves readers with a willfully distorted view of Indian shrimp exporters that could cause harm to the very workers AP claims to be concerned with, setting back economic development in the region by years.

We are the leading trade association in India representing shrimp exporters, yet AP reporters never reached out to us for comment or input prior to publication. Even worse, when we learned of their reporting after they confronted several of our members and their customers at a conference in the U.S., we reached out to AP ourselves, and they flatly ignored us. They also never responded to our reasonable request that we have an opportunity to respond to any allegations they intended to print about us. They ignored similar outreach from the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) – America's largest seafood trade association – and included only a single brief quote from NFI before that group had a chance to look into any specifics.

At that same conference, AP reporters spread malicious rumors about several of our members that were later demonstrated to be false, as AP was forced to admit. Yet those falsehoods, which were irresponsibly presented as fact, led some customers to interrupt their relationships with some members – a fact that AP outrageously brags about.

Nekkanti, for example, had to chase down Ms. Mendoza [Martha Mendoza, the author of the AP story] after it learned she had spent many days falsely disparaging the company to its customers. The AP article claims our members at Wellcome did not respond to her, but that is untrue, and in fact, Ms. Mendoza never reached out to that company at all. If she had, Wellcome would have provided the same details of its strong labor and environmental record that it provided to the customers to whom AP presented the unsubstantiated allegations.

As far as we can tell, AP never presented our association or any of our members with specific details about the infractions they alleged, making it impossible for us to examine them or indeed to establish whether they ever happened. But, we did inform AP that none of the members they asked about had ever been found to have committed any of these kinds of infractions and made them aware of multiple, independent channels our employees use to safely report any issues.

AP left all of that out of the story. They also misleadingly conflate the shrimp exporters we represent with smaller companies that operate only within India's domestic market, leaving readers with the impression that major exporters are involved in the bad behavior they describe without presenting any evidence that that is the case.

We will have more to say about this deeply flawed article on our website, and we encourage anyone who cares about the truth of these matters to read our substantive and substantiated response before making up their minds.

## Southern Shrimp Alliance Executive Director John Williams:

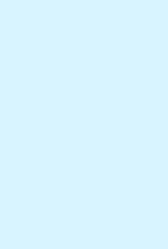
The Outlaw Ocean Project has confirmed what every American shrimper knows in their bones. While we have gone to work for the last 40 years with the federal government on our shoulders watching our every move, our government rolled out the red carpet to foreign industries to sell into this market. Rather than hold us to the same standard, the U.S. shrimp industry is stunned to see federal agencies propose backtracking on the minimal requirements that have been demanded on foreign seafood suppliers.

The Southern Shrimp Alliance commends the incredible work of Corporate Accountability Lab, and we are all in awe of the bravery of the men and women willing to investigate and report on the horrors within India's shrimp industry. All throughout the coast of this country, shrimp boats are tied up and not working due to the cheap, imported shrimp that has overwhelmed our market. American families are suffering, but CAL's report is an essential reminder to all of us that the pain caused by unsustainable, cheap shrimp production is even greater in the vulnerable people exploited to build the wealth of an elite few.

## Oceana Campaign Director Max Valentine:

This [CAL] report is the latest devastating example of imported seafood produced by forced labor ending up on American plates. From squid to tuna to shrimp, recent investigations show serious gaps in oversight and accountability in the seafood sector. The U.S. is becoming a dumping ground of illegally caught or unregulated seafood that is processed using forced labor, and workers and the oceans are paying the price.

Until all imported seafood is traced from dinner plates back to fishing nets or farms, with each step in the supply chain documented, bad actors will continue to ignore laws to increase profits. Requiring all seafood to be traced to a legal fishery and through an honest supply chain will give consumers more confidence in the seafood they eat and support businesses that follow the rules. The continued reports of forced labor in the seafood supply chain are a rallying cry for immediate action. The United States must improve seafood traceability and increase transparency at sea so that we know our seafood dinner did not come with a side of human rights abuses. Illegal fishing and forced labor should have no seat at our dinner tables.



## About the Author

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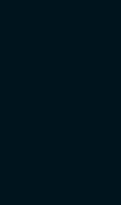
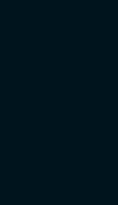
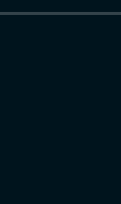
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