

The true cost of shrimp

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By SeaChoice



The number one importer of farmed shrimp to the Canadian marketplace is India. This product is the latest connected with human rights and environmental abuses as part of a series of investigations that have exposed the global seafood supply chains' failure to safeguard people and our planet.

Investigations by the Outlaw Ocean Project and Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL) uncover [serious allegations](#) of forced labor, child labor, worker exploitation and dangerous working conditions in the Indian shrimp supply chain - from hatcheries and shrimp farms to processing plants. CAL's report, [Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry](#) emphasizes that such abuses are a common occurrence in the Indian shrimp sector, driven by cost-cutting pressure to meet the global demand for cheap shrimp.

The investigations point to the failures of governments (the Indian government and those who import the product) to enforce human rights and environmental laws, allowing abuses in the shrimp industry to flourish.

The report also details how hatcheries and farms release contaminated waste into local waterways. Groundwater and drinking water of nearby communities, agricultural lands and fishing waters are polluted by the effluent. Sensitive coastal habitats, including mangroves, are destroyed to build shrimp hatcheries and farms.

The report additionally points to illegal antibiotic use, as well as an over-reliance on antibiotics recognized as "highly important" to human health by the World Health Organization. Lack of government regulation, oversight and enforcement are also recurrent concerns in India's farmed shrimp industry. Irresponsible use of antibiotics in aquaculture (and other livestock farming) can contribute to the looming global threat of antimicrobial resistance - where bacteria and viruses become resistant to drug treatments.

The Outlaw Ocean investigation published evidence that antibiotic-positive farmed shrimp was shipped to the United States despite the Food and Drug Administration prohibiting antibiotics in shrimp. Canada also prohibits the import of shrimp containing antibiotics; however, only five percent of imports are tested by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In comparison, the European Union tests 50 percent of imported shrimp.

Outlaw Ocean and CAL also point the finger at seafood certifications for reassuring customers with claims of responsibly produced seafood when in reality they "function as little more than marketing ploys that fail to protect workers of the environment". For example, the industry-established and dominant certification, Best Aquaculture Practices, was found to exclude crucial stages of the supply chain from compliance, masking stages of production at high risk of labor abuses and forced labor. Evidence showed audits were often compromised, resulting in missed or ignored violations. The Aquaculture Stewardship Council was also called out for its auditing practices.

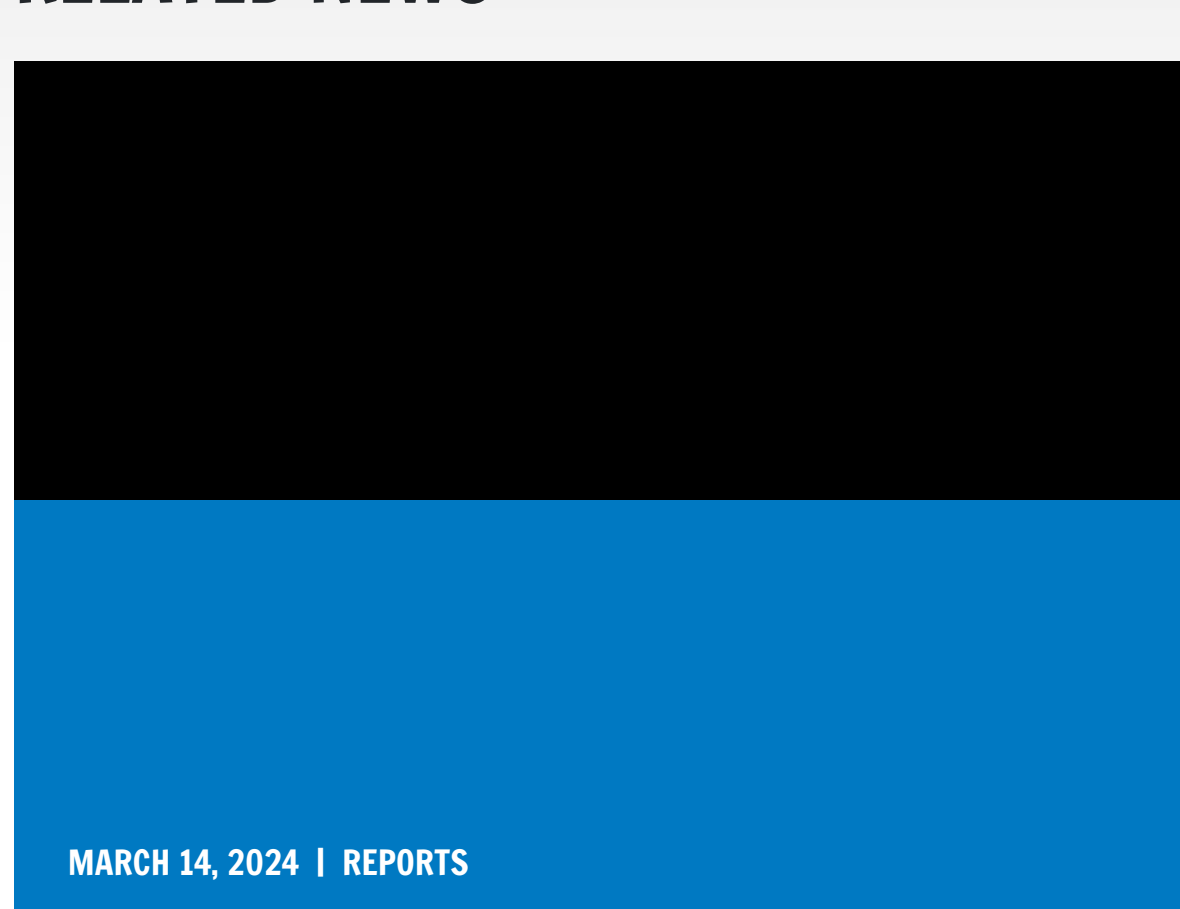
Major grocers rely on certifications as part of their sustainable seafood policies. However, growing evidence (including [SeaChoice's own work](#)) shows these schemes are not fit for purpose. CAL's report recommends grocers utilize their significant power to transform the Indian shrimp sector by prioritizing human rights and sustainability practices across the supply chain. They call on significant buyers [such as Walmart](#) to change their procurement practices.

With seafood certifications increasingly exposed for [greenwashing](#) and 'fair-washing', grocers and seafood companies must go beyond certification and implement due diligence with respect to human rights and sustainability throughout their supply chains.

To ensure companies do take action to protect human rights and the environment, governments need to establish legislation that mandates preventative and remedial action in relation to adverse impacts within their supply chain. The European Parliament is expected to [adopt such legislation soon](#). We need Canada to follow suit.

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