

Huffman, Grijalva call for action to combat human rights abuses in seafood supply chain

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Recently, House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.) and Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) sent two letters—one to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and one to the U.S. Department of Commerce (Commerce) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—responding to recent investigative reporting in *The New Yorker* by Ian Urbina ([HERE](#) and [HERE](#)), which documents major human rights abuses perpetrated by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices by the People’s Republic of China’s fishing fleet and seafood processing centers.

Letter to CBP

In their letter to CBP, Reps. Grijalva and Huffman reference reporting that Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in the People’s Republic of China are being forced to work throughout the seafood supply chain. The lawmakers urge the agency to use its authorities to take action, writing in part:

“Recent *New Yorker* stories reporting the prevalence of Uyghur and other forced labor in the harvest and processing of seafood in China expose horrific working conditions and extensive forced labor across nearly every facet of China’s seafood supply chain. Alarming, this same seafood is finding its way into U.S. markets, which is unacceptable. Therefore, we urge you to use the full authority granted under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) and Section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930 (19 U.S.C. 1307) to investigate these reports and fully enforce violations of these Acts.”

The letter also requests documents describing actions the agency has previously taken on this issue, as well as actions to develop a strategy around and investigate the newly reported evidence and allegations.

Letter to Commerce and NOAA

In their letter to Commerce and NOAA, Reps. Grijalva and Huffman highlight the importance of increased traceability and transparency along the entire seafood supply chain to prevent imports tainted by forced labor or IUU fishing practices.

The lawmakers emphasize how a robust, comprehensive Seafood Import Monitoring Program is critical to that goal and urge action accordingly, writing in part:

“Expanding the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) to all imported seafood—and ensuring the program is functional, well-implemented, and enforced—is key to closing U.S. markets to seafood derived from IUU fishing and abusive labor practices. In the six years that have elapsed since the SIMP was promulgated, Congress has directed substantial appropriations toward SIMP implementation, and Congress continues to promote legislative solutions to ensure the U.S. has a functional seafood traceability program. In conjunction with those efforts, we expect you to use any and all existing executive branch authorities to tackle the urgent issue of IUU fishing.”

The letter also requests additional information about how the agency is using congressional appropriations to expand and strengthen SIMP, including detailed expenditures, current methods and efforts to improve SIMP implementation, and return on investment.

Additional Background

Over the past few decades, the People’s Republic of China has dramatically expanded its distant-water fishing fleet, rapidly growing their economic influence across the globe; China’s seafood industry now accounts for one-fifth of the international seafood trade. As documented by recent reporting, human rights abuses—like forced labor, violence, and medical neglect—frequently occur on Chinese fishing vessels, as well as in processing plants. These human rights abuses and other IUU fishing practices pose major national security risks, geopolitical challenges, and environmental harm. The recent *The New Yorker* reporting focuses specifically on China’s seafood industry, but NOAA’s 2023 report on IUU fishing identified additional nations engaging in IUU fishing practices and forced labor in the seafood industry.

The United States—the single largest importer of seafood in the world—has several laws in place to prevent importing seafood tainted by forced labor, but IUU fishing practices make it difficult to trace seafood along the entire supply chain.

In addition, some of the U.S. government’s legal tools are not being used to their full potential. More action is needed to improve efforts to identify, eliminate, and prevent human rights abuses in the seafood industry.

