

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Chair Mallory,

The House Committee on Natural Resources Committee (Committee) is conducting oversight related to reports of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced labor in the seafood supply chain. Recent reporting by the Outlaw Ocean Project¹ and the Associated Press² have evidenced such issues with alarming detail.

IUU fishing threatens domestic seafood production and economic prosperity for Americans. According to a report by the U.S. International Trade Commission, nearly eleven percent of all U.S. seafood imports, equal to \$2.4 billion annually, are derived from IUU fishing.³ Cheaper illegal seafood imports cost the U.S. commercial seafood industry millions of dollars annually by driving down the cost of American-caught and processed seafood.⁴ Globally, \$10 to \$23 billion are lost annually due to the impacts of IUU fishing on global markets.⁵

IUU fishing also threatens our oceans' and fish stocks' current and future health. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, IUU fishing "remains one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems due to its potent ability to undermine national and regional efforts to manage fisheries sustainably as well as endeavors to conserve marine biodiversity."⁶ IUU fishing contributes to overfishing, threatens marine biodiversity through bycatch and destructive unregulated catch practices, and can exacerbate habitat and ecosystem destruction.

¹ The Outlaw Ocean Project. *The Whistleblower / India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath*.

<https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/the-whistleblower/>

² Associated Press. *AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive'*

<https://apnews.com/article/india-shrimp-seafood-industry-labor-abuses-us-imports-e5b51878eafbb6e28977710b191eb7de>

³ U.S. International Trade Commission. *Seafood Obtained via Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing: U.S. Imports and Economic Impact on U.S. Commercial Fisheries*. <https://www.usitc.gov/publications/332/pub5168.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Agnew et al., *Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing*, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0004570>

⁶ FAO, *Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing*, <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/en/>

Americans deserve access to safe and healthy seafood. As the global leader in seafood importation, the United States must work to uphold the integrity of the entire supply chain, even when operations occur within other countries. The Biden administration has already committed to addressing IUU fishing and forced labor in its 2022 National Security Memo (NSM-11)⁷ and 2023 Worker Rights Memo.⁸

The problem is multijurisdictional, impacting human rights, national security, and environmental protection. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is uniquely positioned to support an all-of-government approach to improve traceability, enforcement, and protections for seafood laborers and American consumers. We urge you to identify a person in leadership within CEQ who can lead CEQ's engagement on this issue.

To assist the Committee in its oversight role, please provide answers and periodic updates to the following questions:

- 1) What steps is CEQ taking to engage with relevant federal agencies and their responses to the recent aforementioned issues, such as those reported by Ocean Outlaw Project and the Associated Press;
- 2) What steps is CEQ taking to urge relevant federal agencies to use existing authorities to address reports of IUU fishing and forced labor in the seafood industry; and
- 3) What steps is CEQ taking to identify strategies for improving seafood traceability and enforcing laws that help prevent or discourage reports of IUU fishing and forced labor in the seafood industry?

Thank you for your continued attention to this critical issue. Should you have any questions, please contact the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Democratic and Republican staff with the House Committee on Natural Resources. We look forward to working with you as part of our ongoing investigation.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources

⁷ The White House. *Memorandum on Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Associated Labor Abuse*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/06/27/memorandum-on-combating-illegal-unreported-and-unregulated-fishing-and-associated-labor-abuses/>

⁸ The White House. *Memorandum on Advancing Worker Empowerment, Rights, and High Labor Standards Globally*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/11/16/memorandum-on-advancing-worker-empowerment-rights-and-high-labor-standards-globally/>



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