

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

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Spinrad,

The House Committee on Natural Resources (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 or \$2.4 billion worth of all U.S. seafood imports 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 stock's 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/>

In light of the reports noted above, the Committee urges NOAA, in cooperation with other Federal agencies, to investigate these allegations and use subsequent findings to improve its enforcement processes to ensure the integrity of the seafood supply chain.

To assist the Committee in its oversight role, please provide all applicable decision memoranda, letters, emails, communications, situation summaries, discussion and evaluation documents, and briefing documents to support these responses, in electronic format, by September 18, 2024.

- 1) Has NOAA opened any investigations or audited shipments in response to allegations of IUU fishing on global markets, particularly as reported by Outlaw Ocean Project or Associated Press reports?
- 2) Is NOAA currently assessing whether its processes under SIMP have proven adequate to identify allegedly fraudulent paperwork, as reported by various media outlets?
- 3) Has NOAA audited or flagged any recent imports reported to SIMP as potential candidates of IUU fishing or fraud?
- 4) How does NOAA identify risk factors for fraud or IUU fishing that SIMP should screen for? Do these factors vary based on credible reports, including those from the media, internal whistleblowers, or nonprofits?
- 5) Please provide a timeline describing milestones and completion of NOAA's revision of current audit procedures to incorporate automated screening processes, including any which may analyze the reported import data and identify potential risks of seafood fraud and IUU fishing.

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



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Garret Graves
Member of Congress

Melanie A. Stansbury

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Member of Congress