

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

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Julie Su
Acting Secretary of Labor
U.S Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Su,

Recent reporting by the Outlaw Ocean Project¹ and the Associated Press² have evidenced issues of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced labor in the seafood supply chain with alarming detail. We are looking closely into this matter and would like to better understand the steps your agency is taking to address these serious concerns.

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

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

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>

to addressing IUU fishing and forced labor in its 2022 National Security Memo (NSM-11)⁶ and 2023 Worker Rights Memo.⁷

The Department of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs' mission is to “strengthen global labor standards, enforce labor commitments among trading partners, promote racial and gender equity, and combat international child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.” IUU fishing runs counter to each of these goals, promoting forced labor and facilitating profoundly anti-democratic values, all while undercutting conservation needs.

Please provide an update on the U.S. Department of Labor's efforts to combat IUU fishing abroad, along with answers to the following questions. Please provide applicable decision memoranda, letters, emails, communications, situation summaries, discussion and evaluation documents, and briefing documents to support these responses.

- 1) How is the Department of Labor (DOL) working to ensure that national human trafficking task forces recognize the fishing industry as a source of trafficking and exploitation?
- 2) What plans, policies, and actions does DOL have planned to expand the Safe Fishing Alliance to other countries?
- 3) How is DOL strengthening “Fostering Accountability in Recruitment for Fishery Workers” and expanding it to other countries?
- 4) How has DOL's “Comply Chain” tool helped address forced labor in the seafood industry? What else can it do to address this issue further?
- 5) How does DOL do to fund overseas victim assistance related to forced labor in the seafood industry?
- 6) What additional ways does DOL engage with foreign governments and international organizations to promote labor rights and combat IUU fishing?
- 7) What actions has DOL taken in collaboration with other Federal agencies to address IUU fishing? How does DOL plan to strengthen these collaborations?
- 8) How has DOL's “Towards Freedom at Sea” 2023 handbook for detecting forced labor in commercial fishing influenced or changed the work of DOL and others in addressing forced labor in the seafood industry?
- 9) Given recent reporting, what steps is DOL taking to address the human rights abuse allegations in the seafood industry and strengthen its efforts accordingly?
- 10) How long does it take for DOL to update the “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor” after newly reported abuses are discovered?
- 11) On May 10th, 2024, DOL removed shrimp from Thailand from the list of products requiring federal contractor certification for forced and indentured child labor. What lessons did you learn from your “Combating the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Shrimp and Seafood Processing Areas in Thailand” project that can be applied to the issues documented in the reporting?

⁶ 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/>

⁷ 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/>

12) Outlaw Ocean reporting also implicates Chinese seafood suppliers as employing Uyghur Forced Labor. We commend the recent addition of seafood as a high-priority sector for enforcement under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA). How will DOL, in collaboration with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, continue to use the UFLPA to stop the flow of seafood into the United States processed by Uyghur labor?

Thank you for your continued attention to this critical issue. Should you have any questions, please contact any of our staff. We look forward to working with you as we investigate this matter further.

Sincerely,



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



Garret Graves
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Melanie A. Stansbury
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