

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

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Blinken,

Recent reporting by the Outlaw Ocean Project<sup>1</sup> and the Associated Press<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Globally, \$10 to \$23 billion are lost annually due to the impacts of IUU fishing on global markets.<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> IUU fishing contributes to overfishing, threatens marine biodiversity through bycatch and destructive unregulated catch practices, and can exacerbate habitat and ecosystem destruction.

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<sup>1</sup> The Outlaw Ocean Project. *The Whistleblower | India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath*.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

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

<sup>6</sup> 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)<sup>7</sup> and 2023 Worker Rights Memo.<sup>8</sup>

The State Department's mission is "to protect and promote U.S. security, prosperity, and democratic values and shape an international environment in which all Americans can thrive." IUU fishing is the antithesis of these goals, undercutting American domestic seafood producers and facilitating profoundly anti-democratic values.

Please provide answers to the following questions, as well as applicable decision memoranda, letters, emails, communications, situation summaries, discussion and evaluation documents, and briefing documents to support these responses.

- 1) What actions has the State Department taken to strengthen domestic and international ocean governance to combat IUU fishing?
- 2) How does the State Department engage with seafood-catching and processing nations to encourage implementing and enforcing laws that promote sustainable fishing practices and protect workers' rights?
- 3) How has the State Department worked with other nations to ensure our allies address forced labor and illegal fishing?
- 4) How has the State Department assessed the effectiveness of the existing multilateral agreements to combat IUU fishing? For example, how has the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing that went into effect in 2016 impacted the U.S.' ability to combat IUU fishing?
- 5) What actions has the State Department taken in collaboration with other Federal agencies to address IUU fishing? How does the State Department plan to strengthen these collaborations?
- 6) Given recent reporting, what steps is your agency taking to address these abuse allegations in the seafood industry and strengthen its efforts accordingly?
- 7) 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 the State Department, 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?

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<sup>7</sup> 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/>

<sup>8</sup> 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/>

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  
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



Melanie A. Stansbury  
Member of Congress