

## Written Testimony to Supplement the Record

### **Senator Dan Sullivan** **Commissioner, Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)**

#### From Bait to Plate—How Forced Labor in China Taints America’s Seafood Supply Chain

October 24, 2023

#### **Overview**

Chair Smith, Co-Chair Merkley, Fellow Commissioners, I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony for this hearing, as I was unable to attend in person. I commend the Commission for a timely and laser focus on the impacts of Chinese forced labor on the global seafood market, which has a significant negative impact on an industry that is an economic pillar of my state of Alaska.

Forced labor in the Chinese seafood supply chain—both on land and on sea—has been an open secret for years, but never has it been as well documented as in CECC witness Ian Urbina’s *Outlaw Ocean Project* reporting. His thorough reporting on human rights abuses throughout the seafood supply chain, coupled with other witnesses’ testimony and credible documentation from many others through the years, is a call for action.

These human rights abuses need to be combated because they are just wrong. But these unacceptable practices also have two related impacts: the damage done to global seafood sustainability, and the devastating economic impact forced labor has on seafood producers that are playing by the rules—like those in my state. Fortunately, the U.S. and its partners can tackle all three of these challenges through a series of national and global actions.

As we all know, Alaska leads the country in the magnitude and sustainability of its seafood sector. According to the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute in its 2022 report, the Alaska seafood industry nationally creates over 100,000 full-time-equivalent jobs, \$6 billion in annual labor income, and \$15 billion in economic output. Alaska and the U.S. seafood industry in general have produced large, diversified harvests as a result of a decades-long commitment to sustainable management.

But the Alaska seafood industry and others around the world that maintain high sustainability and labor standards cannot compete—and shouldn’t have to—with China’s system of forced labor and vacuum-the-ocean efforts that hide behind obscured supply chains. These supply chains can crush our U.S. producers because their “competition” is seafood caught through illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, including with forced labor, as well as seafood caught in Russian waters.

## What Next?

I commend our government's efforts in combatting IUU fishing and forced labor, particularly the efforts of the agencies that are members of the U.S. Inter-Agency Working Group on IUU Fishing. But we need to do even better. Our efforts must be both national and global as China has strategically positioned itself as an integral component in the global seafood supply chain, including many U.S.-produced products. Here are some thoughts on how to further improve our response:

1. **U.S. Laws.** The U.S. has a number of laws to combat IUU fishing, forced labor or both, including the Maritime Security and Fisheries Enforcement Act, the Moratorium Protection Act, and the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act. But are they effective? Do they need further enforcement? Are there gaps or flaws that need amending? Further resources to improve enforcement? Lawmakers need to know these answers, and to provide targeted support if needed.
2. **Stronger Seafood Import Controls.** Part of U.S. import controls include the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP), which, despite its comprehensive-sounding name, is focused on requirements for importers; importers are a very small part of the global seafood supply chain. This is a baked-in design flaw in a program that is meant to be used for screening and deterrence only, so it does not find imports of IUU seafood. So instead of expanding this resource-intensive program, I support strengthening other efforts to ensure integrity in the supply chain, including enforcing existing U.S. laws and supporting adoption of global standards by seafood importing nations.
3. **Working with Global Partners.** The seafood supply chain is truly global. If seafood produced by forced labor cannot be imported into one country, it will likely be moved to another. Tackling the issue means looking at adopting global standards and assisting other countries with their seafood management. Some of these efforts are captured in my *Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvests Act of 2023*, which focuses on fighting IUU fishing at its sources.
4. **Banning Imports of Russian Seafood.** Despite Russia's ban on the import of U.S. seafood, and despite the brutal, illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, and despite the President's March 2022 Executive Order 14068 that resulted in the prohibition of Russian seafood imports, seafood products of Russian Federation origin continue to enter United States commerce through "substantial transformation" that is often occurring in China. I urge the Biden Administration to close this loophole that is lending itself to unethical practices in both China and Russia, and for Congress to pass my *United States-Russian Federation Seafood Reciprocity Act of 2023*, which would codify this ban.
5. **Corporate Efforts, Consumer Knowledge.** I don't think any of us would knowingly choose to eat seafood that came from forced labor. I support transparency throughout the

supply chain, including corporations raising their standards and labeling that informs consumers on the origin of their seafood.

### **Conclusion**

We—Congress, executive branch agencies, industry, nongovernmental groups—share the goal to strengthen a seafood supply chain both ethically and economically. Some of our efforts have been successful, while others have fallen short. This is a moment where we must seize the opportunity to expand our efforts in a thoughtful and comprehensive way. If done correctly we can both bolster our domestic seafood industry AND strengthen the global seafood supply chain that provides healthy, nutritious protein to consumers around the world, strengthens our economy and provides jobs to hard working men and women. Inaction, and the consequences associated with this, are simply not an option.