



**Opening Statement of Chairman Sullivan**  
**CECC Hearing: “Dark Nets, Illicit Labor—Confronting China’s IUU Fishing**  
**and Seafood Supply Chain”**  
**April 16, 2026**

We are here today to examine illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by the People’s Republic of China.

What we’re dealing with is a state-backed system—run by the Chinese Communist Party—that combines illegal fishing, market manipulation, and forced labor.

All in one supply chain.

And it’s happening at scale.

This system has with real consequences for American workers, for law-abiding producers, and for the integrity of the global seafood market.

The PRC has built the world’s largest distant-water fishing fleet. These vessels do not simply compete. They overwhelm. They cheat.

They show up in other countries’ waters.

They push into exclusive economic zones.

They ignore quotas.

They transship and re-label the catch to hide its origin.

That is not fair competition. It is a strategy of economic coercion that has direct consequences here at home.

Alaska is a seafood superpower. We produce over 60 percent of the wild caught seafood in the United States. In Alaska, we have some of the best-managed fisheries in the world. Our fishermen follow the law.

They respect quotas.

They manage sustainably.

They preserve these resources for future generations.

Alaska fisherman should not be forced to compete against fleets that disregard those rules, benefit from state subsidies, and flood global markets with cheap products tied to illegal practices.

That is not fair competition.

And it gets worse.

There is credible evidence that parts of the PRC seafood supply chain involve forced labor, including Uyghur labor and North Korean labor in seafood processing. North Koreans and Indonesians and others are also being used on Chinese fishing boats in conditions that resemble slave labor.

So when we talk about Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing, we are not just talking about resource theft.

We are talking about a system in which illegal fishing, hidden sourcing, labor exploitation, and market distortion are all connected.

That should concern all of us.

Then add Russia to this mix.

Russian seafood can be processed in China, relabeled, and then pushed back into global markets

This undermines sanctions and further distorts prices. It should not be possible, but it is happening right now, as we speak.

This is a serious problem, and it deserves serious attention.

I weighed in extensively with the Trump administration to communicate how much Alaska needs to continue a comprehensive ban on Russian seafood imports to the United States. I was happy to see the Trump Administration renew that ban just a few weeks ago to help maintain and strengthen federal measures that ensure fair trade and protect Alaska's fishermen and coastal communities.

Congress has also begun to respond.

The Senate unanimously passed my Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvests (FISH) Act in April Act. This is an effort I worked for years on with my friend Senator Whitehouse who will join us later in the hearing.. The bill recognizes that IUU fishing is not simply an environmental issue. It is also an economic issue, a labor issue, and a national security issue.

It will strengthen enforcement, improve coordination, and ensure that the United States treats these activities with the seriousness they require.

Congress also passed, and the President signed into law, a provision I included in the NDAA last year, barring the Pentagon from selling or procuring Chinese seafood imports in commissaries or serving them in military dining facilities. Our servicemen and women should be eating freedom fish from the United States, not Communist fish harvested using slave labor.

I have also been a leading advocate for elevating the role of seafood within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We've made meaningful progress already. In the FY2026 appropriations, Congress provided funding for a Seafood Liaison at USDA.

Today, the USDA announced the creation of a new USDA Office of Seafood. This Office is key component for integrating seafood into USDA programs, under the direction of the Seafood Liaison to coordinate seafood policies and programs to provide support for our seafood industry like U.S. farmers have. But we need to do more.

If illegal seafood can still be caught in one place, processed in another, relabeled, and sold into the United States, then we still have significant gaps to close.

If Withhold Release Orders from Customs are not being enforced robustly, if traceability remains incomplete, and if import controls are still too easy to circumvent, then bad actors will continue to exploit those weaknesses.

And that is why this hearing matters.

We need to understand where our enforcement tools are working, where they are falling short, and what more should be done. I'm particularly interested in hearing our experts testify on the utility of tools like the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention

Act. Senator Merkley and I have introduced the follow on to that bill, UGASA (the Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act) that reinforces some of these provisions. As it moves through the process, maybe there is more we can do with it. We're open to suggestion.

At the same time, this is not a challenge the United States faces alone.

Countries around the world are dealing with the same tactics, the same coercive pressures, and the same difficulty of enforcing rules against distant-water fleets that operate with scale and in the shadows.

So we need to work with partners to improve enforcement capacity and increase the cost of this behavior.

Though China's IUU fishing is a global and complex problem, at the end of the day, the principle here is simple.

If you are engaged in illegal fishing,  
If you are exploiting workers,  
If you are hiding both—

Then you should not have access to the American market. Period. That's the standard.

This hearing is an opportunity to expose the Chinese IUU fishing system.

It is an opportunity to identify where our policies need to be stronger, and make clear that the United States intends to

defend lawful producers,  
uphold human rights,  
and enforce the rules.

I want to thank our witnesses for helping bring transparency to what is designed to stay hidden.

I look forward to their testimony.