

# ILLEGAL FISHING AND FORCED LABOR PREVENTION ACT

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a threat to ocean ecosystems and is inextricably linked to human rights abuses at sea. Human trafficking and forced labor in the seafood industry are a humanitarian crisis coupled with the environmental degradation driven by IUU fishing.

IUU fishing includes fishing without authorization, ignoring quotas, fishing in closed areas or with prohibited gear, catching unmanaged species, and not reporting catch to proper authorities. Up to one third of annual global seafood catch is estimated to be a product of IUU fishing.<sup>1</sup> These practices threaten food security, compromise the health of the oceans and fisheries, and undermine fishers and seafood businesses that play by the rules. Fishing operations that engage in human trafficking and forced labor are often the same ones that break the laws regulating seafood harvest. Labor violations include abuses at sea and within processing facilities, such as forced labor, child labor, human trafficking, withholding of pay, physical abuse, debt bondage, and more.

The United States is the largest seafood importer in the world, and while the United States has taken steps to combat IUU fishing, more can and should be done. A 2021 report by the U.S. International Trade Commission found that nearly 11% of total U.S. seafood imports, worth \$2.4 billion, is a product of illegal or unreported fishing. If IUU imports were prevented, U.S. fishers could increase their income by an estimated \$60.8 million.<sup>2</sup>

The United States has an opportunity to build upon its past leadership on IUU fishing. For human rights, our economy, and our oceans, the US should lead the way in tracking and stopping IUU and unethical seafood imports, increase transparency in the seafood supply chain, and work with other countries to drive changes on the water. Stopping seafood fraud is also critical: mislabeled seafood undermines consumer trust and makes it difficult to know whether seafood is safe, legally caught, and honestly labelled.

The *Illegal Fishing and Forced Labor Prevention Act* would link IUU fishing to forced labor in the seafood supply chain, make seafood import monitoring more effective, increase transparency and traceability from catch to plate, strengthen enforcement against IUU fishing and forced labor, improve interagency cooperation, and increase pressure on other countries to tackle IUU fishing and human rights abuses. The legislation would:

- Expand the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) to all species; increase data requirements for SIMP, including consideration of labor conditions; improve detection of imports at risk of IUU fishing and labor violations; and increase interagency coordination and data sharing.
- Establish seafood traceability and labelling requirements; increase outreach on seafood safety and fraud; and improve seafood inspections and federal enforcement of seafood fraud.
- Strengthen international fisheries management, including expanding U.S. authority to revoke port privileges for fishing vessels associated with IUU fishing and expanding IUU determination criteria to include human trafficking, forced labor, and other labor rights violations.
- Update the responsibilities of the IUU Interagency Working Group.
- Authorize funding for new Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) on vessels and amend requirements for where AIS must be used by U.S. vessels in federal waters and on the high seas.

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<sup>1</sup> Agnew DJ et al. (2009) Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing. PLoS ONE <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0004570>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. International Trade Commission (2021) 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>