



U.S. CONGRESSMAN CHRIS SMITH REPRESENTING NEW JERSEY'S 4TH DISTRICT



- [Home](#)
- [Constituent Services](#)
- [Legislation](#)
- [About Chris](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Newsroom](#)
- Font Size: ▼ ▲

- ▶ [Laws Authored by Chris](#)
- ▶ [Laws Co-Sponsored by Chris](#)
- ▶ [Bills passed the House of Representatives](#)
- ▶ [Smith Amendments offered, passed in the House](#)
- ▶ [Bills that became Law and Resolutions Passed](#)

District Offices to Serve You:

- ▶ **Constituent Service Center**
1005 Hooper Avenue
Toms River, NJ 08753
Tel.: (732) 504-0567

- ▶ **Washington, D.C. Office**
2373 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515
Tel.: (202) 225-3765

- [Constituent Services](#)
- [Newsroom](#)
- [4th District](#)
- [Contact Chris](#)
- [Flag Requests](#)
- [Visit Washington, DC](#)



Search Legislation

current legislation
 all legislation

SUBMIT

Home > News

Press Release

Defending New Jersey and U.S. seafood/fishing industries **Smith co-chairs hearing on China's illegal fishing practices**

Washington, Apr 16, 2026



Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Ian Urbina, one of the witnesses who testified at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)'s April 16th hearing, entitled "Dark Nets, Illicit Labor—Confronting China's IUU Fishing and Seafood Supply Chain."

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Co-Chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), today co-led a [congressional hearing](#) on China's illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices, which distort seafood markets, harm American fishermen, undermine law and order, enable human rights abuses, and threaten national security.

"From the earliest days of seafaring, the oceans have been governed not only by currents and commerce, but by rules—rules that distinguish lawful navigation from piracy, fair trade from exploitation, and order from lawlessness," said Smith during his [opening remarks](#).

"Today, we are confronted with a disturbing modern version of that lawlessness: a system of dark fleets, opaque supply chains, illegal fishing, and coerced labor that threatens not only American workers, but also human rights, the rule of law, and our national security.

"China's cruel and unethical fishing practices not only harm their laborers, who are tortured, beaten, and exploited during the cultivation and processing processes—they also harm U.S. economic interests by taking away jobs, paychecks, and resources from American and New Jersey commercial fisheries," continued the China policy expert and senior lawmaker.

Smith is a strong supporter of the [FISH Act](#), legislation to combat foreign IUU fishing. Authored by CECC Chair Senator Dan Sullivan, this legislation will blacklist offenders from U.S. ports; bolster the U.S. Coast Guard's enforcement capabilities; and advance international and bilateral negotiations to achieve enforceable agreements. Smith has been working with like-minded House members and the House leadership to help ensure that this much-needed reform bill soon becomes law.

In 2023, Smith chaired his first congressional hearing in a series on China's IUU fishing practices, entitled "[From Bait to Plate: How Forced Labor in China Taints America's Seafood Supply Chain](#)," where witnesses revealed how China's distant-water fleets are marred by labor exploitation and illegal trespasses into the sovereign waters of other countries.

The seafood illegally caught on these fleets is then packaged and processed by predominantly Uyghur and North Korean laborers, the vast majority of whom are forced to work under grueling, inhumane, slave-like conditions.

This forced labor-tainted seafood makes its way into global supply chains, ending up in countries around the world—including the United States, making it difficult and patently unfair for U.S. and New Jersey fishermen to compete and earn their honest wage.

In 2018 alone, the seafood cultivated by NJ commercial fishermen was valued at over \$170 million. In fact, Point Pleasant's fisheries (in NJ-04) were ranked 35th in nationwide value by the NOAA, as they generated more than \$32 million in revenue that same year.

Ian Urbina, the Director and Founder of the Outlaw Ocean Project, who testified at Smith's 2023 hearing about the prevalence of forced labor on China's fishing fleets and in their seafood processing facilities, spoke today about how China's IUU fishing practices have only worsened and are in blatant violation of the United States' [Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act \(PL 117-78\)](#), legislation co-sponsored by Smith.

"Our investigation mapped the supply chains of more than 1,200 fish farms in Xinjiang and Tibet. We found seafood from these farms going to a dozen countries, including the United States, and to companies supplying public institutions such as military bases, public schools, and congressional cafeterias," stated Urbina.

"Let's be clear: repression in these regions is one of China's hidden costs. It is the externality that helps produce cheap seafood. It is part of China's competitive advantage and helps explain the trade surplus in this commodity," he continued.

The other witnesses, RADM Scott Clendenin (Ret.) and Hon. Dean Pinkert, Former Commissioner and Vice Chairman of the U.S. International Trade Commission—underscored the grave national security risks associated with China's IUU fishing, as well as the legislative and economic tools Congress can use to cut forced labor-tainted seafood out of the global supply chain and protect America's fishing and seafood industries.

"Under my tenure in the U.S. Coast Guard, we declared IUU Fishing to be the world's top maritime security challenge—surpassing piracy," testified RADM Clendenin (Ret.). "This issue goes beyond economic unfairness to our domestic industry - it is a direct subsidy to criminal networks."

RADM Clendenin described how China's "IUU Fishing is a driver of conflict and deeply intertwined with the most dangerous transnational threats America faces," such as drug and migrant smuggling.

"Congress has assembled a flexible toolkit of legislation that can be used to address this problem—Section 307 of the Tariff Act, the UFLPA, Section 1595a civil penalties, and Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974," stated Hon. Pinkert. "The issue is not an absence of statutory authority; it is the failure to use these tools at scale, in combination, and with the creativity the circumstances demand."

Towards the end of his opening statement, Smith reiterated the necessity of the United States holding China to account for the human rights abuses and unethical practices it perpetrates on its fishing fleets and in its seafood processing facilities.

"This hearing is about protecting American jobs and protecting national security as well. China's distant-water fishing fleet does not operate in a vacuum. These vessels often advance the Chinese Communist Party's objectives: asserting maritime claims, projecting presence in disputed waters, distorting markets, and exploiting vulnerable workers in service of larger geopolitical ambition.

"So, this is about more than seafood. It is about whether the United States will tolerate a system that rewards coercion, harms American fisherman, weakens sanctions enforcement, creates food insecurity in Africa, and erodes the integrity of global commerce."

###



<p>Washington DC Office 2373 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515</p> <p>Phone: (202) 225-3765</p>	<p>Constituent Service Center 1005 Hooper Avenue Toms River, NJ 08753</p> <p>Phone: (732) 504-0567 *Please call for an appointment.</p>
---	--