

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As co-chairs of the Senate Caucus to End Human Trafficking, we are concerned about the link between illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing and human trafficking in the seafood supply chain. The U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* identified 54 countries that either have trafficking in their fishing industries, are transit countries for trafficking forced labor on fishing vessels in other jurisdictions, or have a high risk of trafficking in their fishing industries. As a result, we urge the Administration to ensure that the Presidential Task Force on Combating IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud addresses human trafficking within the seafood supply chain by issuing a strong rule that will increase transparency and traceability for seafood products sold in the U.S.

First, we request that the Administration's final rule require catch documentation that includes verifiable information requirements and full chain traceability for seafood products sold in the U.S. The U.S. will not be able to tackle the immense problems associated with IUU fishing without including specific benchmarks and timelines for expanding the documentation requirements to all seafood products and extending traceability requirements throughout the full supply chain in the final rule. Likewise, catch documentation must include information about workers onboard fishing vessels to combat abuse and trafficking, as detailed by *The New York Times* in its "The Outlaw Ocean" series.

Second, we encourage the Administration's final rule to focus on enforcement requirements. The lack of enforcement on the high seas and an increase in transshipment through mother ships allow for increased human trafficking on vessels. As marine ecosystems collapse and the pressure for inexpensive seafood continues, fishing vessels are forced to travel longer distances to find fish. Regular returns to shore make longer distance hauls unprofitable, consequently trapping laborers on fishing vessels for weeks, even years, at a time. Providing penalties would create greater accountability for operators of IUU fishing vessels, consequently deterring these operators from engaging in egregious human trafficking practices.

Third, we implore the Administration to ensure the final rule applies to all seafood, not just a small number of species. The proposed "at risk" species approach currently favored by the Administration will only target "seafood products of particular concern because the species at issue are subject to significant seafood fraud or because they are at significant risk of being caught by IUU fishing." Focusing on a limited number of species is not likely to solve the problem because we fear it will redirect bad actors engaging in human trafficking to other species outside of those deemed to be "at risk."

We look forward to working with you to ensure these policies are implemented and encourage you to continue working with the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. As a human rights champion, the U.S. can and should endeavor to provide adequate safeguards to protect some of the world's most vulnerable populations from human trafficking.

Sincerely,


ROBERT PORTMAN
United States Senate


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate