

A fishing boat is seen from a distance on a dark, choppy sea. The sky is overcast and grey, suggesting a storm or late evening. The water is dark blue with white foam from the waves. The boat is white with some dark markings on its side.

CHINA: THE SUPERPOWER OF SEAFOOD

At sea and on land, the country dominates, but with what environmental and human cost?

THE OUTLAW OCEAN PROJECT

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CRIMES AT THE BORDER

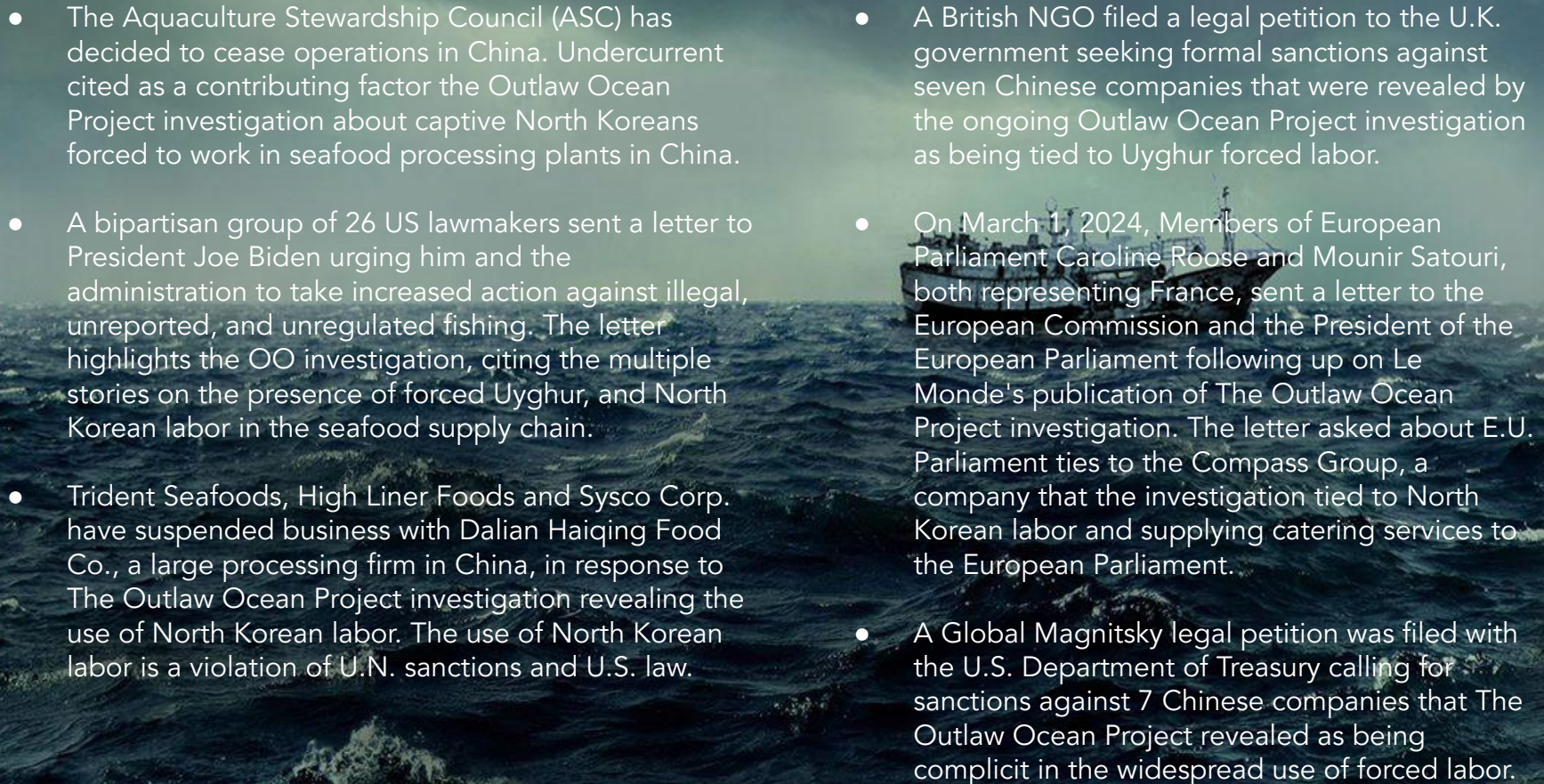
The North Koreans Behind Global Seafood

China uses thousands of workers from the Hermit Kingdom, in violation of U.N. sanctions and U.S. law. Many at the plants recounted rampant sexual abuse.

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- With as many as 6,500 ships, the Chinese distant-water fishing fleet is more than double the size of its closest global competitor
 - Almost half of the Chinese squid fleet, 357 of the 751 ships studied, were tied to human-rights or environmental violations, including forced labor, debt bondage, illegal fishing and severe neglect causing death
 - Forced labor from China's Xinjiang province is being used extensively: China has forcefully transferred more than a thousand ethnic minorities to work in Shandong province, the country's most important fishing and seafood processing hub
 - At least fifteen seafood processing plants in Liaoning province near the border have used over a thousand North Korean workers since 2017, with the workers, almost all female, describing a broad pattern of abuses including violence, debt bondage and pervasive sexual abuse
 - European companies distributing or exposed to tainted Chinese seafood include major importers, distributors and retailers across the continent: Albert Heijn, Aldi, Auchan, Bon Preu Group, Carrefour, Cité Marine, Distribuciones Rodrigo, Edeka, Eroski, Iceland, Lidl, Metro, Musgrave's, Nomad Foods, Nordic Seafoods, Sysco France, Tesco, and Transgourmet.
 - Major government suppliers in Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands, including Sysco France, Compass Group Belgium, and Transgourmet are distributing seafood from importers that are supplied by plants tied to violations on both land and at sea
 - An importer in Europe, Pittman Seafoods, supplies frozen fish from a plant that uses North Korean labour to the Compass Group Belgium, the primary supplier to cafeterias and canteens in European Parliament buildings

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- The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) has decided to cease operations in China. Undercurrent cited as a contributing factor the Outlaw Ocean Project investigation about captive North Koreans forced to work in seafood processing plants in China.
 - A bipartisan group of 26 US lawmakers sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging him and the administration to take increased action against illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. The letter highlights the OO investigation, citing the multiple stories on the presence of forced Uyghur, and North Korean labor in the seafood supply chain.
 - Trident Seafoods, High Liner Foods and Sysco Corp. have suspended business with Dalian Haiqing Food Co., a large processing firm in China, in response to The Outlaw Ocean Project investigation revealing the use of North Korean labor. The use of North Korean labor is a violation of U.N. sanctions and U.S. law.
 - A British NGO filed a legal petition to the U.K. government seeking formal sanctions against seven Chinese companies that were revealed by the ongoing Outlaw Ocean Project investigation as being tied to Uyghur forced labor.
 - On March 1, 2024, Members of European Parliament Caroline Roose and Mounir Satouri, both representing France, sent a letter to the European Commission and the President of the European Parliament following up on Le Monde's publication of The Outlaw Ocean Project investigation. The letter asked about E.U. Parliament ties to the Compass Group, a company that the investigation tied to North Korean labor and supplying catering services to the European Parliament.
 - A Global Magnitsky legal petition was filed with the U.S. Department of Treasury calling for sanctions against 7 Chinese companies that The Outlaw Ocean Project revealed as being complicit in the widespread use of forced labor.



Stories

Explanatory films about the Chinese fleet and the global seafood supply.



The North Koreans Behind the World's Seafood



The Chishan Group



How the Investigation was Conducted



Uyghurs in Seafood



China: Seafood Superpower



Daniel's Story



When Squid Became Popular In The U.S.



Death On the Wei Yu 18



Beriberi and Deadly Neglect

Methodology

FAQs about the investigation's reporting tactics.



How did the reporters visit Chinese distant-water fishing ships?

The reporting team shadowed Chinese ships in four fishing grounds. These were located in the South Pacific Ocean, near the Galapagos Islands; in the South Atlantic Ocean, near the Falkland Islands; in the Atlantic Ocean, near Gambia; and in Korean waters, in the Sea of Japan. Our trips at sea to visit the Chinese fleet were facilitated by hitching rides with willing partners. In some cases, national law-enforcement authorities or private fishing-boat captains agreed to taxi us to target the various fishing grounds around the world. In other instances, ocean-conservation groups, including Sea Shepherd, EarthRace, and Greenpeace, transported the team to high-seas locations of interest.

Findings

A synopsis of the investigation's conclusions.



Fueled by the world's growing and insatiable appetite for seafood, China has dramatically expanded its reach across the high seas. With as many as 6,500 ships, the Chinese distant-water fishing fleet is more than double the size of its closest global competitor.

The size and behavior of the Chinese fishing fleet raises concerns. Seafood is the world's last major source of wild protein and the largest globally traded food commodity by value. Western political analysts say that having just one country controlling this precious resource creates a precarious power imbalance. They warn that China is expanding its maritime reach in ways that are undermining food security, especially in poorer countries, and eroding international law. Frequent illegal incursions by these ships into other nations' waters are heightening military tensions. American lawmakers are concerned because the U.S., which is in a trade war with China, is also the world's largest importer of seafood.

A fishing boat is seen from a distance, navigating through a turbulent sea with dark, choppy waves. The sky is filled with heavy, dark grey clouds, creating a somber and dramatic atmosphere. The boat is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame. The text 'theoutlawocean.com' is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

theoutlawocean.com

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