

**Testimony of Eric K. Kingma, Ph.D.  
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**Hearing before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**“America First: U.S. Leadership & National Security in  
International Conservation”**

**Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.  
Longworth House Office Building**

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on this important subject. My name is Eric Kingma. I serve as the Executive Director of the Hawaii Longline Association (HLA).

HLA is comprised of 150 Hawaii-based longline fishing vessels that target tuna and swordfish. The Hawaii-based longline fleet is a major fishery of the United States and is responsible for over 90 percent of the Nation’s landings of bigeye tuna, 60 percent of yellowfin tuna and over 50 percent of the Nation’s swordfish landings. The fleet is the largest food producer in the State of Hawaii, with annual landings exceeding 30 million pounds and a dockside value of around \$120 million annually. The landed value of Hawaii longline fleet consistently ranks Honolulu Harbor within the Nation’s top seven ports in terms of fisheries economic value.

**Competition With Foreign Imports: An Unlevel Regulatory and Economic Playing Field**

Around 80 percent of fishing effort by Hawaii longline vessels occurs on the high seas in international waters amongst foreign competition. Due to Marine National Monument designations, no other fleet nationally has been displaced from U.S. waters to the extent of the Hawaii longline fleet (see Figure 1). Not only are we competing with less regulated foreign fleets in international waters, but we are competing with foreign imports on a daily basis within the U.S. seafood market. A large percentage of imported seafood into the United States comes from subsidized foreign fleets subject to low levels of monitoring and nearly zero enforcement of environmental laws. On the other hand, the Hawaii longline fleet, like other federally managed U.S. fisheries, is subject to stringent regulations and monitoring requirements pursuant to several statutes including but not limited to:

- Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Clean Water Act
- Coastal Zone Management Act
- Antiquities Act
- National Marine Sanctuary Act
- Billfish Conservation Act
- Merchant Marine Act

The United States is a global leader in its domestic fisheries management regulations, management processes, and comprehensive environmental laws. It is also a global leader in international marine conservation efforts by setting standards for which international commissions adopt. For example, there are several measures developed within the Hawaii longline fishery that are now established international standards for protected species mitigation for sea turtles, seabirds, and marine mammals.

## **U.S. Seafood Market Is Dominated by Cheaper Foreign Imports**

U.S. seafood producers are in fierce competition with foreign imports in the U.S. seafood market. Unfortunately, we are losing in most cases. We're seeing devastating impacts from import competition in the Hawaii longline fleet for bigeye and yellowfin tuna and swordfish as well other notable U.S.A fisheries including Gulf shrimp, West Coast albacore tuna, East Coast blue crab, Gulf catfish, Alaska groundfish (pollock/cod), Atlantic lobster, and Gulf/West Coast oysters. Imports are often available for 30 to 50% cheaper or more than U.S. produced seafood.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), approximately 70-85 percent of seafood consumed in the United States is from foreign imported sources.<sup>1</sup> The total value of U.S. imported seafood in 2023 was \$25.5 billion resulting in an annual seafood trade deficit of approximately \$20 billion.<sup>2</sup> Over the last 30 years, the inflation adjusted value of foreign imports into the United States has increased by 133% (see Figure 2). The increase in imports has put downward pressure on domestic seafood prices, limiting revenue for American fishermen and domestic seafood processors. Foreign fisheries benefit from lower labor costs, government subsidies, lower regulatory and environmental costs, and cheaper processing operations.

## **IUU Fishing: A National Security, Economic, and Conservation Threat**

The U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that nearly 15% of wild caught seafood imports into the United States is from Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated foreign fisheries.<sup>3</sup> IUU fishing is broadly defined such that it includes transnational crime syndicates involved in the capture and sale of endangered species, human trafficking and forced labor, state-sponsored unregulated fleets, and underreporting from otherwise legally licensed vessels. Impacts from IUU fishing also run the gamut, from overfishing, habitat loss, bycatch of depleted species, to worker welfare, food safety and market distortion. The United States government should do all in its authority to prevent IUU associated seafood from entering the U.S. market.

## **Using the Power of the U.S. Market to Drive Conservation Objectives**

The United States seafood market is among the world's largest. As such, the United States government has a tremendous ability to level the playing field between domestic fisheries and international fleets through the power of market access. The import provisions of the Marine

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<sup>1</sup> [Fisheries of the United States Reports | NOAA Fisheries](#)

<sup>2</sup> [U.S. Seafood Imports Expand as Domestic Aquaculture Industry Repositions Itself | Economic Research Service](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Seafood Obtained via Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing: U.S. Imports and Economic Impact on U.S. Commercial Fisheries](#)

Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) are a good example. The MMPA requires the National Marine Fisheries Service to make determinations on whether foreign nations have comparable marine mammal protection measures to the United States.

After nearly 50 years of the provisions being in the statute, NMFS first issued determinations in September 2025. Out of 2500 assessed fisheries from 46 countries, NMFS found only 9.6 percent (240 foreign fisheries) do not have comparable marine mammal measures as the United States. NMFS gave most industrial foreign fisheries a passing grade including those of China. This was a major opportunity missed by the U.S. government to level the playing field. NMFS needs to conduct significantly more robust reviews of foreign fisheries in the future and hope this committee exerts oversight of the matter.

### **China's Global Fisheries Influence and Linkages to IUU Fisheries**

China is the world's largest fishing nation, and its global fisheries reach has been widely documented in recent years. For example, Chinese fishing vessels fish in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of over 90 countries and are responsible for around 30 percent of all fishing effort on the high seas. China's highly subsidized fishing fleets serve as political and economic bridges to other nations.

With respect to the Pacific Islands region, China's fishing influence and tuna fisheries has grown rapidly over the last 15 years. Chinese tuna vessels fish in international waters and in the EEZs of several countries including the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (both former U.S. Trust Territories). With respect to FSM and RMI, Chinese flagged tuna vessels offload to Chinese owned companies fish processing and distribution companies that ship nearly daily fresh and frozen tuna into the United States.

China also has close ties to Kiribati, which is Hawaii's closest foreign neighbor. The proximity of Kiribati's Line Islands to Pearl Harbor (around 1,000 miles) and China's growing influence and development in that country should be monitored closely if not prevented. This is needed not only for U.S. geopolitical concerns but also from an IUU fisheries perspective.

NOAA's 2023 Biennial Report to Congress on IUU fishing lists China as one of 7 countries that has IUU fisheries.<sup>4</sup> For example, China does not monitor its distant water tuna fleets to international standards and nowhere close to U.S. levels. China's operational level data reporting as well annual reporting against catch limits within international RFMOs is known to be suspect. Furthermore, China's distant water fishing fleets have been documented to involve forced labor as well as the harvest of protected species including marine mammals.

China, of course, is not the only country with IUU fisheries. The global seafood supply chain is expansive, involving harvesting nations, processing nations, and diverse markets. For example, it is not uncommon for fish to be landed by a vessel of Country A, caught in the waters of Country B, transshipped at sea on a vessel flagged to Country C, processed in Country D, and imported into the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> Other countries identified by NOAA in its 2023 Report to Congress are: Angola, Grenada, Mexico, Taiwan, Gambia, and Vanuatu.

## **Leveling the Playing Field and Preventing IUU Seafood from Entering the United States**

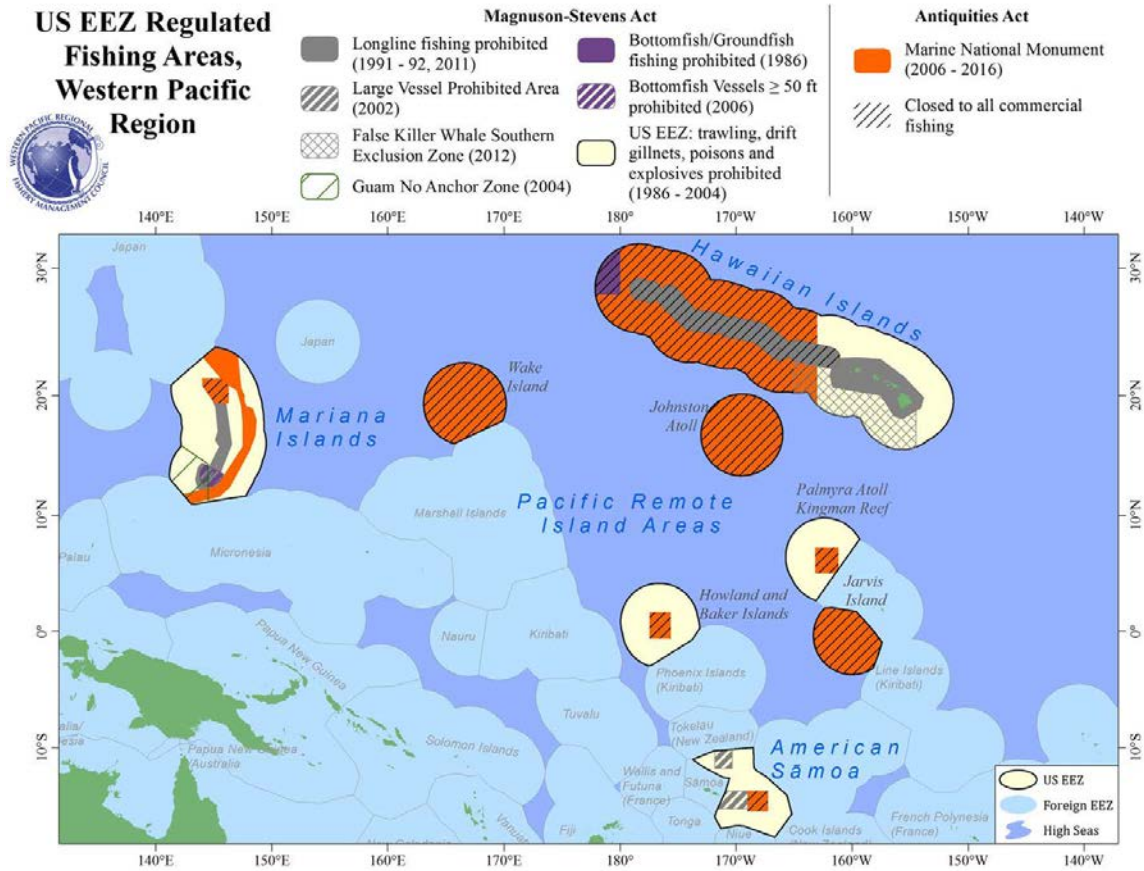
The United State can do more to prevent seafood from IUU fisheries entering the U.S. market as well as leveling the playing field between foreign fisheries and U.S. domestic producers. The following provides a list of actions to support these objectives:

- 1) Restrict imports: Utilize existing laws to their full extent to prohibit seafood from foreign fisheries that do not meet U.S. environmental standards including monitoring and reporting.
- 2) International engagement: The United States government needs to continue to participate in international commissions such a Regional Fishery Management Organizations.
  - U.S. delegations to these international management organizations should advance measures that are adopted within domestic U.S. fisheries, which by law are based on best available science.
- 3) Eliminate harmful subsidies in foreign fisheries: Unlike the Nation's farmers, U.S. fishermen do not receive subsidies to reduce operational costs (e.g. fuel); whereas many foreign fleets do receive subsidies from their national government.
  - This significantly disadvantages U.S.A fishermen as foreign fleets can operate at much lower costs and sell their seafood into the U.S. market at much lower prices.
- 4) Implement electronic supply chain tracking for all imports: Country of origin for seafood is often opaque due to where the fish was caught, flag of vessel, and processing country. The United States should implement a system digital catch and supply chain records that are harmonized across Customs and Boarder Protection and NOAA import requirements. NOAA's Seafood Import Monitoring Program should be expanded to all species.
- 5) Seafood country of origin for restaurants: Existing federal law requires country of origin labeling on seafood for retail establishments only and not restaurants. Consumers should be provided information to allow them to make informed choices on the origin of the seafood they eat. This is especially important for seafood, which the overwhelming majority consumed in the United States is from foreign sources and an alarmingly high level from IUU fisheries.

## **Conclusion**

Imports of poorly monitored, less regulated, subsidized, foreign seafood, including that from foreign IUU fisheries, into the United States perpetuates ocean harm and hurts American fishermen and our associated seafood industry. The United States should use the power of its immense seafood market to prevent imported seafood from foreign fisheries that do not meet U.S. environmental standards, are from subsidized fisheries, and/or from IUU fisheries. Steps should also be taken to improve supply chain tracking as well expanding country of origin labeling to the foodservice sector. Benefits include improving ocean health, supporting the long-term continuity of American fisheries, and protecting American seafood consumers.

**Figure 1: U.S. EEZ Regulated Fishing Areas in the Western Pacific Region**



**Figure 2: Annual value (inflation adjusted) of U.S.A Seafood Imports, 1995-2023**

