

January 20, 2022

The Honorable John Kerry
Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for your years of public service. Your tireless efforts have made a significant difference to the world, from your focus on national security, climate change, human rights, and more.

2022 is being called the year of the ocean. This offers the United States major opportunities to engage across the globe and to regain our long tradition of leadership in protecting the ocean and the people who depend on it. The ocean faces unprecedented challenges, including climate change, ocean acidification, pollution, and overfishing, all of which degrade the marine ecosystems that provide food and security to communities around the world.

Throughout your career, you have demonstrated unparalleled leadership to safeguard the health of the ocean, first in the Senate and then at the State Department with the creation of the Our Ocean Conference (OOC). Beginning in 2014, the OOC put a spotlight on the human, economic, and ecological security concerns associated with IUU fishing and set in motion specific actions needed to end these destructive practices. These actions were the result of two years of deliberate, public facing dialogue across the federal government. Perhaps most notably, the [process initiated at the first OOC in 2014](#) led to promulgation of the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP), a seafood traceability program whose purpose is to prevent IUU fish from entering U.S. markets.

In 2015, the Presidential Task Force on Combatting IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud, which was established at the OOC in 2014, provided a clear and carefully vetted [Action Plan](#) for next steps. The Trump Administration kept the trains running but did not significantly advance progress. You have an incredible opportunity to finish the job started in 2014 by applying lessons learned to the 2016 roadmap and continuing forward.

There are several key reasons to continue strong U.S. leadership in this space. Incomplete SIMP species coverage, inadequate implementation, and insufficient enforcement as well as gaps in development of complementary tools have allowed domestic losses to continue. In fact, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission, the United States imported 2.4 billion dollars of IUU harvested seafood in 2019 alone.

Additionally, the global community is increasingly aware of the security implications of continued, unchecked IUU fishing. China, which has the largest global distant water fishing fleet, is impinging on the sovereign resource rights in many states while using its fleet as a tool of soft power and coercion in key regions. Navy Secretary Del Toro recently emphasized these points in public remarks, citing IUU fishing as a profoundly destabilizing force and one that has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat.

The connection between forced labor, human rights violations at sea, and IUU fishing are clear and inextricably linked. And the challenge of climate change continues to increase, with predicted impacts hitting coastal states in the tropics hardest. As waters warm and ecosystems shift, it becomes harder for fisheries to rebound from overfishing, including as magnified by IUU fishing. Tropical regions also have the greatest overlap across sustainability, human rights, and geopolitical concerns.

The Biden Administration has an opportunity to finish the job to combat IUU fishing by ensuring full traceability and transparency in the global seafood supply chain. We ask you to build on your legacy of ocean leadership and make an announcement at the Our Ocean conference in April to put the United States back on track to fight IUU fishing, consistent with Biden Administration priorities. An executive order or presidential memo should:

- 1. Exert White House level leadership:** The Biden Administration should provide Executive Office leadership and direction to the Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing authorized by the Maritime SAFE Act, to expedite action and progress needed to combat IUU fishing and drive transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain.
- 2. Close the U.S. market to all IUU seafood products by a specified date:** Ensure all seafood entering the U.S. market is fully traceable to verifiably legal sources by expanding the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) to all species by a specified date or timetable.
- 3. Improve Seafood Import Monitoring Program implementation and enforcement:** Improve SIMP operations and enforcement and establish a timebound, public process to provide directives and reporting requirements for SIMP enforcement, grounded in modern analytical tools.
- 4. Update the U.S. government definition of IUU fishing and strengthen associated diplomatic mechanisms:** Require that the broader definition of IUU fishing, as defined by the UNFAO and established in U.S. law, is adopted throughout the U.S. government. This new definition would include vessels operating on the high seas and beyond territorial waters and would be interpreted to include human rights and labor violations. Such a process should establish the necessary diplomatic mechanisms, tools, and political will to identify and then pressure bad actor nations, responsible for IUU fishing and human/labor rights violations in the seafood sector, to improve their fisheries and vessel management, oversight, and enforcement.
- 5. Require transparency through AIS:** Require all U.S. flagged vessels above a certain size to have and continuously run AIS (automatic identification system) as the prerequisite for establishing a similar global standard to ensure transparency and meaningful enforcement by a specified date.
- 6. Prioritize working with your interagency partners to stop forced labor and human rights abuses within seafood supply chains:** IUU fishing and human and labor rights abuses in the seafood sector are inextricably linked. The U.S. government must work simultaneously to tackle both sets of issues. Efforts should be made to work closely with interagency partners, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Commerce, the Department of State, and the Department of Labor, to maximize and strengthen utilization of U.S. government tools and data in order to achieve full implementation of laws like Section 307 of the Tariff Act to prevent the import of seafood products produced through forced labor practices.

There is broad bipartisan support for improving SIMP and related U.S. efforts to combat IUU fishing and human and labor rights abuses in the seafood sector. Leveraging U.S. market power is the most effective way for the United States to substantively address the challenges of IUU fishing and human and labor rights abuses in the seafood sector. Doing so will require the Administration to address the shortcomings noted above and capitalize fully on the landmark steps of the Obama Administration. To achieve this outcome, we hope the President will initiate the objectives outlined above by Executive Order or Presidential Memorandum for announcement at the Our Ocean Conference in April. Thank you for your continued leadership on these issues. We stand ready to help in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

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Oceana

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Steve Trent
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Chief Executive Officer
World Wildlife Fund

cc:

The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce

The Honorable Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

The Honorable Richard W. Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and
NOAA Administrator

The Honorable Monica Medina, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental
and Scientific Affairs, Department of State

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and Environment, White House Office of
Science and Technology Policy

Melanie Nakagawa, Special Assistant to the President and NSC Senior Director for Climate and Energy,
The White House