



Kerry McCarthy

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Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

CC: Dame Angela Eagle MP, Minister for Fisheries

5 February 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to express our alarm at the findings of the Coalition for Fisheries Transparency's report, [Criminal catches: how to stop the supply of illegal seafood to the UK](#), and urge the Government to take urgent action in response to increase risk-based import controls and fully implement the [Charter for Transparency](#).

The report reveals that seafood linked to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and severe human rights abuses is entering the UK due to weak enforcement and under utilisation of our import controls. As a result, the public is at real risk of unwittingly purchasing seafood tainted by environmental harm and exploitation, while law-abiding British fishers are forced to compete to sell their produce on a domestic market flooded with cheap, imported seafood that is at high risk of being illegally-caught.

IUU fishing has devastating impacts on marine ecosystems, it drives the collapse of fish populations, and often involves destructive fishing practices such as shark finning and the targeting of endangered species. It directly undermines global conservation efforts and the long term sustainability of fish populations that support UK coastal livelihoods and provide a vital source of income and nutrition for billions of people in the Global South. Furthermore, investigations frequently show that where IUU fishing occurs, it is accompanied by human trafficking, forced, bonded and slave labour.

As covered in [The Times](#) and revealed in *Criminal catches*, more than a quarter of UK seafood imports originate from countries that ranked among the world's most notorious offenders for illegal fishing, including those that have been formally warned by the European Union (EU) for failing to address IUU fishing in their fleets. China and Russia are consistently among the worst performing states globally, yet scrutiny of their imports remains far below levels required to identify and screen out illegal catches. The UK receives around 1,000 catch certificates annually from China - covering roughly 58,000 tonnes of seafood - but only four consignments have been refused since 2012. No Russian catch certificates have been verified or refused since 2021.



Verification checks – a process through which authorities scrutinise catch documentation and request evidence from exporting flag-states to confirm legality – are a critical safeguard and using them frequently sends a clear message that a country wants to protect its market from illegal seafood. Despite this, since Brexit the UK has seen a three-fold decline in verifications – significantly fewer than best practice countries. Spain, for example, carries out more than 18 times as many verifications as the UK, despite historically importing only around twice the number of catch certificates. Since Brexit, key monitoring and reporting of the UK's IUU import controls has also ended, meaning we are now effectively blind to the full extent to which these controls are being implemented. Further, we are deeply concerned to learn from the report that Port Health Authorities currently receive no guidance identifying and prioritising high-risk seafood consignments for scrutiny. This lack of advice prevents a coordinated, risk-based approach and hinders the efficient use of their limited resources.

We welcome the Government's [recent confirmation](#) of its intention to update the information required in the UK catch certificate next year. It is imperative that these reforms match new data requirements from the EU – improvements that parliamentarians, industry and civil society have long supported. Falling behind the EU in this and other related areas risks the UK becoming Europe's dumping ground for illegal and slave-caught seafood.

We should also match the EU's introduction of a digitised catch certificate system, which would speed up processing times, allow for less administrative burden, and aid UK authorities in using a risk-based approach to identify and respond to IUU fishing links in imports. The use of a paper-based system in 2026 is deeply outdated and leaves us vulnerable to seafood fraud.

Crucially, we also urge the UK to require the provision of labour-specific risk information in catch certificates provided by seafood importers to the UK. Information such as the vessel's time at sea, trans-shipment history, a vessel or captain's history of prosecutions for labour offences, and whether crew have access to wifi serve as internationally recognised indicators of forced labour, trafficking and other serious abuses of crew. This information, which should already be held or easily accessible to importers, would enable UK authorities to assess the risk that seafood has been produced through both IUU fishing and associated labour abuses, which so often occur side by-side. It would also encourage importers to conduct more robust supply chain due diligence, while creating a strong incentive to source from vessels and captains with clean records on labour abuses, rather than having to disclose links to unscrupulous operators.

We regard these changes to the UK's catch documentation as important priorities. However, further strengthening is urgently required to ensure that the UK is not seen as an easy entry point for seafood linked to criminality, environmental destruction and human exploitation.



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We therefore urge the government to adopt the full set of recommendations outlined in *Criminal catches*, including:

- Turning the UK's [public support](#) into a timebound commitment to fully implement the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency.
- Implementing a “carding” system based on yellow and red cards to incentivise positive reforms and ensure meaningful consequences for countries failing to act against IUU fishing. UK consumers were protected by such a system before Brexit.
- Significantly increasing verification checks - with a clear focus on high-risk consignments - to prevent illegal imports and protect responsible industry.
- Implement a risk-based approach to identify consignments for further scrutiny at the border.

Together, these measures would help protect our ocean, support ethical supply chains and level the playing field for responsible UK fishers and businesses that sell seafood on the UK market.

We would welcome a meeting with you or a member of your ministerial team to discuss these findings and how we can work together to support a strengthened UK response.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

[Signatories below]

Kerry McCarthy MP

Sarah Champion MP

Lord Randall of Uxbridge

Lord Grayling

Karl Turner MP

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Damer

Baroness Golding

Baroness Jones of Moulscloomb

Siân Berry MP

Carla Denyer MP



Adrian Ramsay MP

Dr Ellie Chowns MP

Chris Hinchliff MP

Rachael Maskell MP

Lord Teverson

Pippa Heylings MP

Imran Hussain MP

Olivia Blake MP

Baroness Willis of Summertown CBE

Ruth Jones MP

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP

Alison Hume MP

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

Wera Hobhouse MP

Melanie Onn MP

Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE

Baroness Young of Hornsey OBE

Baroness Sheehan

Andy Slaughter MP

Dr Roz Savage MP

Clive Efford MP

Barry Gardiner MP

Neil Duncan-Gordon MP

Irene Campbell MP

Stella Creasy MP

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

Alex Sobel MP

Lord Banner KC

Baroness Harris of Richmond DL

Jim Shannon MP

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington

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Baroness Lister of Burtersett CBE

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Ian Byrne MP