



ALASKA

Bering Sea Crabbers

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Seattle, Washington- Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers (ABSC) calls on President Obama to immediately initiate an import ban on Russian seafood products to the United States. This ban is in retaliation for the recently announced ban on seafood imports into Russia from the US and the EU, the continued tension over the situation in Ukraine, and the increasingly militant stance Russia seems to have adopted over the past several years with respect to its overall foreign policy. Mr. Putin has demonstrated that he is more than willing to flex Russian economic muscle to achieve its foreign policy objectives. It's time for the US to follow suit and flex some muscles of its own.

While ABSC understands and supports this issue within the broader geo-political context, we would like to take this opportunity to speak to the issue more narrowly and focus specifically on imports of Russian crab into the US market.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) recently testified to the Presidential Task Force on IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) Fishing that *"since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 there has been an explosion of IUU crab fishing within Russia's exclusive economic zone. At some point along the trade route, IUU crab is laundered to appear as if it is of legal origin. Mis-declaring quantities, mislabeling products, creating false documentation, and bribing individuals are known techniques for laundering illegal crab."* WWF goes on to detail how this illegally harvested crab moves through intermediate nations including Japan, South Korea, and China before ultimately ending up in the US market.

Based on Russian trade data and a calculation of live weight equivalent, the McDowell Group of Juneau, Alaska recently estimated that Russia exported 195 million pounds of crab in 2013. Official Russian harvest data for the same year notes a legal harvest of 96.1 million pounds. A simple mathematical calculation suggests that nearly 99 million pounds of crab exported from Russia in 2013 was illegally harvested. That equates to roughly 40% of the king crab on the world market. As previously indicated, a significant amount of that crab will find its way onto the plate of US consumers. These unwitting consumers have little, if any knowledge, that by eating unspecified king crab they may be supporting this illegal activity. In addition to the harm to consumers, American crab fishermen in Alaska also feel the "pinch."

Wall Street Journal writer Jim Carlton reported on this issue in a 2013 article entitled *Alaskan Crabbers Get Pinched by Poachers*. In the article Mr. Carlton quotes a

National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) spokesperson whose agency "*estimates that illicit Russian crab has cost US fishermen-many of them in Alaska- \$560 million since 2000.*" A more recent article in [Bloomberg Businessweek](#), *Searching for the Russian Crab Mafia*, makes a direct link between illegal crab harvests and Russian organized crime. Finally, this past February Georgetown University professor Mark P. Lagon testified to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations about the direct link between organized crime, illegal fishing, and human trafficking.

In short, we can clearly see from the available evidence that Russia exports a significant amount of illegal crab and has been doing so for decades. The lion's share of the proceeds from this activity support Russian gangsters who may also be engaging in human trafficking. US consumers and Alaskan fishermen are suffering as a result. This all begs the question: Why is the US market still open to Russian crab given what we know already?

While we urge the Obama Administration to address this issue in the short term by initiating an immediate import ban on Russian crab into the US market, we do so with the understanding that a trade ban is simply a short term "fix" to a much larger issue. We feel the most effective way to deal with the issue of illegal Russian crab imports to the US would be to include whole cooked crab and cooked crab sections under the list of products subject to Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) requirements. As it stands currently cooked crab products are excluded from COOL. This makes it nearly impossible for the US consumer to differentiate between Russian and US product, not to mention differentiate between legal and illegal Russian product. By including cooked crab under the COOL requirement US consumers will, for the first time, have the necessary information at their disposal to make an informed seafood purchase.

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