

Marine Aquaculture Task Force

Position Paper on Offshore Aquaculture

The Marine Aquaculture Task Force was established to recommend national standards to ensure that aquaculture in U.S. marine waters poses minimal threats to the ocean environment. Although the Task Force has not yet approved its final recommendations, it has identified and discussed the major environmental concerns associated with marine aquaculture and has reached agreement on the broad outline of recommendations to address these problems.

As the Congress considers whether to make areas of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone available for this potentially significant new use of public ocean resources, the Task Force offers the following suggestions. They are intended to ensure that offshore aquaculture development proceeds in an orderly manner with appropriate public process, protects the long-term public interest in healthy marine ecosystems, and poses minimal risks to fisheries, marine wildlife, and the ecosystems on which they depend.

Any process by which areas of marine waters of the United States are made available for aquaculture should include the following:

1) Prior to permitting offshore aquaculture facilities, NOAA, in coordination with other federal agencies with jurisdiction over offshore activities, should ensure that standards are in place designed to minimize harm to wildlife and ecosystems. At a minimum, such standards should address:

- Genetic and biological interactions with escaped farmed organisms;
- Disease and parasites that may be present in aquaculture facilities;
- Water pollution and alteration of marine habitat; and
- Marine wildlife interactions.

Congress should require that agencies with jurisdiction over marine aquaculture ensure compliance with these standards as a condition of offshore aquaculture permits.

2) Congress should lay the groundwork for the orderly, well-planned and environmentally sustainable development of offshore aquaculture by requiring NOAA to:

- Establish a transparent process for making aquaculture siting and permitting decisions that—
 - Provides ample opportunity for stakeholder input, including public hearings, and
 - Ensures that potential environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts of offshore aquaculture are considered in the permitting process;
- Prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement;
- Consult with affected coastal states. Such consultation should ensure that offshore aquaculture development is integrated with any regional marine planning aimed at managing U.S. marine waters on an ecosystem basis; and
- Consult with regional and interstate fisheries management councils that have management plans in effect that may be affected by offshore aquaculture.

3) Permits for offshore aquaculture should be limited to native species of the genotype native to the geographic region unless a scientific risk assessment shows that the risk of harm to the marine environment from the offshore culture of non-indigenous and/or non-wild genotype aquatic animals is negligible.

4) Congress should direct NOAA, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, to expand current activities or develop new activities that reduce the dependency of marine aquaculture on reduction fisheries for feeds. Acting through the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture, activities should be carried out in collaboration with industry, research institutions, and other stakeholders, including:

- Research on alternative feeds; and
- Development of guidance and best management practices to maximize the substitution in aquaculture feeds of alternatives to fish meal and oil derived from directed reduction fisheries, including—
 - Seafood processing wastes and unavoidable fisheries bycatch,
 - Cultured marine algae and other microbial sources of omega 3 fatty acids;
 - Crop plants and other terrestrial protein sources; and
 - Other products produced in an environmentally sustainable manner.