



July 22, 2021

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Chairman
The Honorable Cliff Bentz, Ranking Member
U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee
for Water, Oceans and Wildlife
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ref: H.R. 274; the *Keep Fish Free Act*

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz:

Earlier this month, the honorable Don Young, representing the great state of Alaska and its myriad of exceptional natural resources and the hearty Alaskans that make wise use of those resources, introduced H.R. 274, the *Keep Fish Free Act*. Consideration of the proposed bill is on your subcommittee's calendar for July 29th. We are writing to provide insight as to why this act could negatively affect the security of our Nation's seafood supply and potentially set back the development of hundreds of jobs and creation of a new sustainable industry.

Since 2017, Pacific6, LLC and the non-profit Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI) have been working with NOAA Fisheries to develop a plan for permitting a farm to rear the native California yellowtail (*Seriola dorsalis*) in federal waters off the coast of southern California. It has long been recognized that the U.S. needs to develop greater self-reliance in its supply of seafood. More than 90% of the seafood we consume (by value) is imported from other countries, often with less rigorous environmental standards than those in the U.S. Pacific Ocean AquaFarms was developed in direct response to a rapidly growing imbalance between domestic supply and domestic demand for seafood.

The U.S. has the greatest agricultural economy in the world and California leads the Nation in production and value. However, climate change is resulting in too little water in California and far too much in other growing areas of the country. Extreme weather fluctuations are resulting in traditionally reliable growing areas becoming far less dependable in their ability to provide food. In contrast, aquaculture can mitigate the lower reliability of terrestrial animal protein production because fish such as California yellowtail do not require fresh water or large tracts of arable land, and temperature fluctuations in the ocean are well within the tolerance limits of regionally important fish species.

We already have rigorous laws and regulations required to permit fish farms in federal waters. Maine, Washington and Hawaii all have farms in State waters. What has been lacking for federal waters is a permitting pathway that encourages prospective farmers to invest the time and money to acquire the requisite permits from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Coast Guard. All of these

permits are issued only after a stringent environmental review as dictated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The permitting for POA is organized around an agreement among these federal agencies that places NOAA Fisheries as the lead agency in the NEPA review process. It took several years to develop that agreement between agencies and we are already well into the environmental review process. The agencies all agreed that to ensure that all public input was reviewed and respected, a full Environmental Impact Statement would be prepared, the first draft of which is being developed. To date the costs to move this process along have exceeded \$2 million and we are still in its early stages.

We chose to develop POA off California for three major reasons:

- 1) We are native Californians with deep respect for coastal resources;
- 2) California is a technology leader and can demonstrate to the Nation how to sustainably produce fish; and
- 3) Over 6% of the Nation's population lives within 100 miles of our proposed site, thereby significantly reducing the carbon footprint of providing high quality seafood.

Many of the previous issues with finfish aquaculture have been overcome as best practices have by necessity and good environmental practice prevailed. Attached is a white paper produced by the National Aquaculture Association in which peer-reviewed scientific studies are used to dispel many of the myths and misinformation about marine farming.

We are willing to discuss at length any concerns you may have. The mission of the partnership between Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute and Pacific6 in forming Pacific Ocean AquaFarms is *Do it here, Do it right, Do it now!* We intend to do so.

The proposed legislation will increase our reliance on imported seafood that will further compound the impacts of global warming. For these reasons, we strongly recommend that the subcommittee not advance the proposed legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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Attachment: NAA's *Refuting Marine Aquaculture Myths, Unfounded Criticisms and Assumptions*

cc: Members of the U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee for Water, Oceans and Wildlife