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June 4, 2025

Representative Harriet Hageman  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Val Hoyle  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

Thank you for holding a hearing on President Trump's recent Executive Order 13921, Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth. We appreciate the opportunity to provide the committee information on both the opportunities to strengthen U.S. seafood competitiveness through expanding aquaculture in U.S. federal waters, and the challenges that currently hinder U.S. growth in this sector. Aquaculture is a sustainable complement to America's wild capture fisheries and its expansion is vital to U.S. seafood competitiveness. We urge the committee to support legislation that would create a regulatory pathway to responsibly advance this essential industry.

Stronger America Through Seafood (SATS), a coalition of industry partners representing businesses across America's seafood supply chain, works in support of increased U.S. production of healthful, sustainable, and affordable seafood. In particular, SATS has been working to educate federal policymakers on the need for legislation to support the expansion of aquaculture in U.S. federal waters. More aquaculture in U.S. waters presents a unique opportunity to build an American seafood industry that is a global leader in sustainable seafood production.

Expanding aquaculture in federal waters would strengthen our economy, reduce our nation's sizeable seafood trade deficit, ensure a more secure and resilient seafood supply chain, and help increase access to affordable, American-grown seafood.

Aquaculture has become the fastest growing food production sector in the world, responsible for nearly all global seafood supply growth since the 1990s. Yet, it remains an untapped industry in the U.S. due to the lack of a clear and efficient federal permitting process. The U.S. currently ranks only 18th in global aquaculture production, behind countries like China and Indonesia. As a result, we import up to 85% of the seafood we consume – half of which is estimated to come from fish farms in other countries.

Open ocean aquaculture is widely recognized by the scientific community as one of the most environmentally sustainable ways to produce protein. Expansion into federal waters would generate an additional \$877 million towards the U.S. economy, create thousands of jobs across the seafood supply chain, revitalize crumbling fisheries infrastructure in coastal communities, and establish new markets for U.S. farmers who supply sustainable fish feeds ingredients.

Regulatory barriers in the U.S. have hindered the expansion of aquaculture in U.S. federal waters. Duplicative and costly environmental reviews by multiple federal agencies and the lack of a clear or timely permitting process has made it nearly impossible for farmers to operate in U.S. federal waters. The lengthy and uncertain regulatory landscape deters investment and has forced many American businesses to outsource our technology and production to other countries. Many have attempted to navigate the regulatory process, but not a single commercial scale farm has made it through to operation.

In May, the EPA issued a permit for a demonstration-scale project consisting of a single net pen off the coast of Florida in U.S. federal waters. This small project has been mired in the permitting process for more than seven years and there are still more hurdles before the project is fully approved to go in the water. When fully approved, the farm will grow red drum, a species that is not fished commercially in the Gulf due to overfishing decades ago. U.S. suppliers primarily source this fish from overseas farms in China, Taiwan, Mexico, and other countries across the globe to meet strong restaurant demand. This pioneering project will set the stage for responsible aquaculture in the U.S., but it is only a first step. Legislation is needed to clarify a regulatory path for aquaculture in U.S. federal waters to help get more farms in the water responsibly.

SATS applauds NOAA's Office of Aquaculture for its efforts to develop Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs), or areas that are deemed optimal for fish farms based on relevant environmental, economic and national security factors, in the Gulf of Mexico and off the coast of California. These AOAs are crucial to reducing regulatory hurdles to establishing open ocean aquaculture in the U.S. and help reduce the time and expense for regulatory compliance by completing the initial analyses for large areas found suitable for open ocean aquaculture. Farmers then seeking permits may then develop the site-specific environmental information, should they choose, to establish a farm in one of the AOAs. SATS supports expanding the science-based AOA process nationwide to reduce regulatory barriers for open ocean aquaculture in the U.S.

We believe this moment presents Congress with a remarkable opportunity: to shape the future of American seafood production by growing more of it here at home. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to the opportunity to work towards legislation that will unlock the full potential of American aquaculture and ensure U.S. seafood competitiveness for decades to come.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Chris Stock', with a stylized flourish at the end.

R. Chris Stock, President  
Stronger America Through Seafood

**Stronger America Through Seafood**  
*Securing a stronger America through increased U.S. production  
of healthful, sustainable, and affordable seafood.*