

Consensus Viewpoint Submitted

by:

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Alaska Center for the Environment
Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association
Alaska Jig Association
Alaska Marine Conservation Council
Alaska Trollers Association
Animal Welfare Institute
Association of Family Fishermen
Blue Ocean Institute
Bon Appetit Management Company
Bonfish & Tarpon Trust
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation
Caribbean Conservation Corporation
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Chesapeake Communities
The Center For Food Safety
Columbia River Crab Fisherman's Association
Commonweal Ocean Policy Program
Concerned Citizens of Montauk Inc.
Conservation Law Foundation
Crab Boat Owners Association
David Suzuki Foundation
DC Central Kitchen
Dean Blanchard Seafood, Inc.
Earth Economics
Eat Alabama Wild Shrimp Committee
Environment Matters
Environment Texas
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
F/V Peso II
Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition
Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association
Florida Wildlife Federation
Food & Water Watch
Friends of Hurricane Creek
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Eel River
Georgia Strait Alliance
Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association
Go Wild Campaign
Greenpeace USA
Gulf Islands Conservancy, Inc.
Gulf Restoration Network
Half Moon Bay Fishermens Marketing Association
Institute for Fisheries Resources
The Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals and Nature
Islamorada Charter Boat Association
Lake Pontchartrain Fishermen's Association
The Lobster Conservancy
Louisiana Bayoukeeper, Inc.
Louisiana Charter Boat Association
Louisiana Commercial Fishermen's Association of Dulac
Louisiana Environmental Action Network
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Mississippi Charter Boat Captains Association
Mississippi Gulf Coast Commercial Fisherman's Association
Monterey Bay Aquarium
National Coalition for Marine Conservation
Natural Resources Defense Council
North Gulfport Community Land Trust
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Ocean Conservancy
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Reef Rod & Gun Club
Oceana
Organized Seafood Association of Alabama
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
Pacific Whale Foundation
People For Puget Sound
Pew Environment Group
Port Arthur Shrimpers Association
Prime Seafood, LLC
Raincoast Research
Reef Relief
RodnReel.com/Sportsman's Paradise TV
Safer Waters in Massachusetts
Savannah Riverkeeper
Save Our Shores
Save Our Wetlands Louisiana
Sea Pearl Seafood Company, Inc.
Ship Island Excursions
Shore Support, Inc.
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Sierra Club, Mississippi Gulf Coast Chapter
Sierra Club, Mississippi State Chapter
Sierra Club, Mobile Bay Group
Sierra Club, New Orleans Group
The Snorkel Bob Foundation
South Carolina Shrimpers Association
Sport Fishing Magazine
Sustainable Fishery Advocates
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services
United Commercial Fisherman's Association
United Southeast Alaska Gillnetter's Association
Wallace Seafoods
Watershed Watch Salmon Society
WiLDCOAST/COSTASALVAJE
Wild Fish Conservancy
World Wildlife Fund – US

January 16, 2009

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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
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Re: PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT: FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR
REGULATING OFFSHORE MARINE AQUACULTURE IN THE GULF OF
MEXICO DATED JANUARY 2009

Dear Dr. McIlwain and other members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council:

We, the undersigned 112 conservation organizations, fishing groups, consumer organizations, seafood businesses, independent scientists, and other concerned parties strongly encourage you to reject the Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan which is slated for Final Action at your January 2009 Council meeting in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. While the Council, its Joint Management Committee, and the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) have worked diligently over the last year on this plan, it is still fundamentally flawed in its approach. Included among a host of shortcomings are the following 4 critical issues:

1. The Gulf Council and NOAA lack the statutory authority to develop a permitting system for open ocean aquaculture under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Congressman Nick Rahall, Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, clearly articulated this issue in his letter dated October 24, 2008. The Council must not move forward without appropriate authority.
2. The Aquaculture FMP is also legally deficient as it fails to meet the minimum requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act. Among other weaknesses, the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement is based on unfounded assumptions and incomplete information (including ignoring the vast body of relevant, peer reviewed scientific information), all reasonable cumulative impacts have not been identified, and the range of alternatives considered is too narrow.
3. The Aquaculture FMP lacks the types of environmental, socioeconomic and liability standards needed to protect Gulf ecosystems and their associated communities from the scientifically-documented risks of open ocean aquaculture. These risks include enhanced pressure on domestic and foreign forage fish fisheries, genetic impacts from interbreeding of escaped and wild fish, disease and parasite amplification and retransmission from farmed fish to wild fish, changes

in benthic communities from nutrient pollution, mortality of birds, marine mammals and other predators attracted to fish cages, and price competition in the marketplace between wild and farmed product. Nothing in the FMP ensures these risks will not be realized during the development of a new industry in the Gulf of Mexico.

4. Finally, a Gulf Council vote to approve the Aquaculture FMP will directly undercut the role of Congress in fully considering federal legislation to develop a coordinated national framework for open ocean aquaculture, with explicit environmental performance standards, to regulate this nascent industry. If approved, the Gulf Aquaculture FMP would establish a harmful precedent by initiating a fragmented system for regulating offshore aquaculture when future plans for national legislation under a new Administration, a new Congress, and new leadership at NOAA are unresolved.

Over 16,000 public comments have been submitted to the Gulf Council on the Aquaculture FMP. Less than 50 have been in support of the plan. Clearly, the general public does not support this plan and neither do the 112 organizations or individuals that have signed this letter. We urge the Council to vote no at its January 2009 meeting and halt any further development of the Aquaculture FMP. Continuing to pursue such an approach is both contrary to current law and an irresponsible use of public dollars, especially when other mandatory regulations, such as the implementation of the new Magnuson provisions, require the Council's attention and resources.

Sincerely,

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