

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: July 29, 2020 Hearing: Building a Stronger and More Resilient Seafood Sector**

Dear Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell and Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation:

Our organizations are members of the Don't Cage Our Ocean Coalition, we are collectively writing to express concerns regarding the upcoming hearing on "Building a Stronger and More Resilient Seafood Sector." While the stated purpose of the hearing is to examine the national and regional impacts of COVID-19 on the seafood industry, and the effects of the fisheries disaster funding provided in the CARES Act, recent political trends and the list of witnesses suggest that offshore aquaculture will be a major topic of discussion. We strongly request that the Committee focus on the urgent needs of fishing communities in a time of crisis, rather than discussing and promoting an industry that will displace fishing families and harm marine ecosystems.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected fishing businesses and the seafood sector as a whole. Disruptions in the global supply chain and restaurant closures have caused drastic declines in seafood sales and thus in prices of wild-caught seafood at the dock. Although some small and medium-scale businesses have successfully pivoted to direct-to-consumer marketing, this shift cannot compensate for all of the losses incurred. In order to adapt to this crisis, fishing businesses need more direct financial assistance, additional forms of support such as seafood procurement from the USDA, and investments in local processing and shoreside infrastructure.

One of the major concerns for commercial fishing and related businesses right now is that bad policy decisions are being made quickly, with little input and oversight, while many people are overwhelmed and consumed by serious health and financial problems. In particular, the Executive Order on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth and related measures would fast-track offshore aquaculture permitting and undermine a variety of environmental and other protections. This and other recent EOs also take away time for thoughtful decision-making, and prevent both agencies and the public from taking an important "hard look" at risks and consequences of these major actions.

Industrial marine finfish farms are indeed a significant threat to coastal communities; they could pollute our waters, reduce tourism and put fishing families - both commercial operations and

recreational boats for hire - out of business. Controversial industrial facilities like the proposed Velella Epsilon in the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Florida, have been met with vehement opposition by the public, businesses and even municipalities due to the unacceptable risks associated with them, including water pollution, increased red tide, more damage to coral reefs, and economic harm to local markets. The City of Holmes Beach issued a [resolution](#) condemning Velella Epsilon, the City of Sanibel quickly [followed suit](#), and the City of Sarasota Commissioners issued a [letter to the EPA](#) publicly opposing it.

Countries like Canada and Denmark, often considered global leaders in aquaculture, are moving away from marine finfish farming, as the risks of widespread environmental damage including farmed fish escapes and ecosystem contamination from chemicals and waste, are too great. We should learn from these lessons instead of allowing high-risk experiments in our waters and turning proposed “Aquaculture Opportunities Areas” into sacrifice zones.

Offshore aquaculture legislation and various finfish farming projects have faced massive public opposition for decades. We urge the Committee to prioritize providing relief to fishing communities that have been hit hard by the pandemic, rather than diverting attention and precious resources to develop an outdated and unnecessary industry that does not belong in our waters.

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cc: U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation