

April 24, 2020

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop:

When the Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture (AQUAA) Act was first introduced in 2018, the legislation failed to advance in both the House and Senate for good reason. It represented a major step backward in the United States' leadership on ocean conservation and fisheries management. The reintroduction of the AQUAA Act, H.R. 6191, as the country continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, is not just tone deaf but a calculated effort to advance a dangerous proposal during a time of crisis. It demonstrates a complete lack of regard for the public health risks posed by raising animals in large numbers and in close confinement, and ignores the struggles that fishing and coastal communities are grappling with currently.

Offshore operations, while profitable for some corporations, exacerbate the pressures that marine ecosystems and fisheries already experience and expose the public to known and unknown health dangers. The wild capture fishing industry, coastal communities, and marine environment are all at risk of devastation. Industrial offshore fish farms could contaminate our waters with pharmaceutical drugs, toxic chemicals, untreated waste, and create a breeding ground for pathogens and diseases. Net pens in the open ocean often fail, and lead to disastrous escapes of farmed fish into the surrounding waters, threatening the wild fish and ecosystem.

The negative socioeconomic impacts on fishing communities, seafood markets and the tourism industry far outweigh the subsidized revenue and sparse number of jobs that offshore fish farming may generate. Due to the projected increase in pollution and other ecological damage caused by offshore aquaculture, the value of wild-caught fish and fish stocks would likely decline. Independent fishermen, many of whom are already struggling to survive, will likely be pushed out of business. Coastal economies that depend on tourism are likely to suffer tremendous losses, because polluted areas will attract fewer visitors.

There is simply no justification for allowing private corporations to profit from using public resources, and impose the true costs of their business on the ecosystem, the fishing industry and coastal communities. Indeed, countries like Canada, Argentina and Denmark are moving away from the offshore aquaculture industry by banning the development of industrial facilities and establishing new national guidelines for aquaculture. Domestically, a facility in Washington state

recently spilled thousands of farmed fish into open waters, wreaking environmental havoc on native fish populations. Newly proposed projects like the Velella Epsilon facility off the west coast of Florida have already been met with fierce opposition from local municipalities and residents.

Aquaculture can play an important role as part of a sustainable food system, but there is simply no way to conduct open ocean finfish aquaculture without jeopardizing the ocean ecosystem, local tourism, fishing economies and local communities. Instead of propping up outdated and dangerous methods like those supported in H.R. 6191, we should focus on supporting responsible aquaculture projects, such as plant and bivalve systems in the ocean that are moderately scaled, appropriately sited, and do not require feed or other inputs, and fully recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS) and aquaponic systems on land, which recycle water without regular discharge, particularly those which utilize regenerative energy.

On behalf of the [Don't Cage Our Ocean Coalition](#), we respectfully urge the Committee to deny consideration of the AQUAA Act.

Sincerely,

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cc:

Representative Collin Peterson, Chair of the House Agriculture Committee
Representative Mike Conaway, Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee
Senator Roger Wicker, Chair of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
Senator Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee