



**Comments on the Draft DOC
National Aquaculture Policy**

Statement by

Ocean Stewards Institute

Dear Department of Commerce,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the collective opinion of the Ocean Stewards on the draft DOC Aquaculture Policy. We believe that this is an important first step towards establishing a responsible, sustainable open ocean mariculture industry in US Federal waters, and we very much look forward to working with DOC in an expeditious manner to move this industry forward.

The Ocean Stewards Institute is a trade association focused on issues of importance for open-ocean mariculture. We Stewards provide leadership and reasoned advocacy for the best use and management of our open oceans. Our membership includes investor groups; representatives from the insurance industry; grain growers from America's heartland; feed companies; offshore cage designers and manufacturers; open ocean fish farmers; the sustainable seafood trade including leading chefs, restaurateurs, distributors and wholesalers; as well as academics and non-profits interested in ocean conservation.

We, the Ocean Stewards, assert that increased production of environmentally-sound, healthful, high quality seafood from open ocean waters is an environmental, economic and public health imperative. Yet we also understand and attest that this opportunity must be balanced by a strong sense of stewardship for the oceans. We recognize that we are operating within the public domain, and we want to see this industry – and other uses of open ocean waters – develop in a way that meets the expectations of the community and the seafood consumer. The Ocean Stewards are the true revolutionaries of the Blue Revolution.

We were therefore very pleased to see the Draft Policy convey a general tone of support for aquaculture growth in US waters. We note that the Draft reaffirms "the importance of aquaculture", and " also "affirms that sustainable U.S. marine aquaculture is vital to the U.S. seafood supply, the economic vitality of coastal communities and the maintenance of working waterfronts." This is an appropriate position, given the U.S.'s gross seafood imbalance of trade.

There is also recognition in the Draft Policy of the significance of aquaculture for the Administration's priorities for creation of green jobs and sustainable economic development. We applaud this heartily. It is notable that the Department of Commerce Draft Policy paper talks about aquaculture as part of "encouraging economic growth and employment opportunities in the United States."

We Stewards were also much encouraged that Commerce and NOAA are firm in the belief that additional legislation is not necessary for open ocean mariculture to proceed. The Draft Policy lists a number of existing laws that are the basis of DOC and NOAA's legal framework to regulate aquaculture, including the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. While the Draft NOAA Policy says that NOAA will "work with Congress...to clarify NOAA's regulatory authority," it does not say that additional legislation is a pre-requisite to further regulation. This brings clarity to this question, for which we are most grateful.

We Stewards similarly believe that further legislation is not required to proceed with aquaculture developments under MSA. While we would be pleased to work with DOC, NOAA and Congress in developing legislation that further promotes aquaculture development, we concur that no further legislation is needed before the open ocean mariculture industry can take its first nascent steps into Federal waters.

The Ocean Stewards harbor two primary concerns with this Draft Policy: delays and details. The Bush Administration first proposed aquaculture legislation as a high priority initiative over six years ago. All we have before us now is a Draft Policy statement that starts the process, but which will need extensive rulemaking to implement. When asked during a telephone briefing how soon it would be before NOAA finalizes this policy, the answer from NOAA officials was that they would "hopefully" have it done by the end of the year -- another seven and a half months. Presumably NOAA would then proceed to rulemaking, or would allow the regional councils to start rulemaking. All this implies that - even with the acknowledgement that aquaculture is important by Commerce and NOAA - it could still be years before any operating permits are issued.

The second concern is the absence of details. The Draft Policy is not specific about the level of environmental review that will be required, or indeed any specifics of the permitting process. The policy refers to "sustainable" practices, but does not define the term. We Stewards are concerned that there are many ways that the process would be further slowed as these details are fleshed out, or – far worse – that the specifics of the policy end up creating too many regulatory hurdles to make aquaculture unworkable in U.S. waters.

We Stewards believe that some greater sense of imperative and specificity is essential, if this Policy is going to actually accomplish anything of substance. We would therefore like to heartily endorse the concept of Interim Regional Aquaculture Production Goals (IRAPGs), as described in other submissions on this Draft Policy. We would urge DOC and NOAA to embrace and adopt IRAPGs as a framework for focusing our efforts, but assuring the broader public that growth in this industry will be measured, and rational. These IRAPGs should be reasonably modest – to ensure that there is broad support for their adoption – but they should also be sufficiently large to encourage investments and provide for some economies of scale. As the industry grows, and demonstrates no significant environmental detriment, then IRAPGs in each region could be expanded.

We believe that both the DOC and NOAA Policies should adopt the modest, measured goal of facilitating the production of up to 12,000 tons of seafood within each of the six NOAA Fisheries regions within the next five years. The entire DOC and NOAA Policy documents should be shaped around these IRAPGs, and subsequent DOC and NOAA actions regarding aquaculture should all be directed towards the attaining of these goals.

The US – led by DOC and NOAA – must embrace, endorse and encourage open ocean aquaculture in Federal waters. If we do not lead this industry forward, then we are doing our seafood economy a disservice; and we are also abrogating our responsibility as stewards of our oceans and as citizens of our planet.

The US needs to lead the development of this industry here, in our waters. If we do not pursue responsible open ocean mariculture here in the US, then it will most certainly happen

elsewhere. Jobs and investment will flow overseas, but - because the world's waters are interconnected - then sooner or later the consequences will still wash up on our shores.

America needs a robust, clear National Policy on Aquaculture, and we need it implemented with alacrity. Our coastal communities need these jobs. And our consumers need the healthful, wholesome seafood that we can and should grow here in American waters.

Thank you,

The Ocean Stewards Institute

Members:

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American Feed Industry Association

Aquacopia Capital Management, LLC

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