



## U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AQUACULTURE POLICY

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to support the development of sustainable<sup>1</sup> marine aquaculture within the context of the Department of Commerce's (DOC) goals of encouraging economic growth and employment opportunities in the United States and of enhancing United States competitiveness in, and exports to, global markets. This policy applies to a broad range of responsibilities at DOC relating to trade, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

For purposes of this policy, aquaculture is defined as the propagation and rearing of aquatic organisms in controlled or selected aquatic environments for commercial, recreational, or public purposes. This definition covers all authorized production of finfish, shellfish, plants, algae, and other aquatic organisms for 1) human consumption and other commercial and recreational uses; 2) wild stock replenishment; 3) rebuilding populations of threatened or endangered species; and 4) restoration and conservation of aquatic habitat.

The U.S. aquaculture industry (currently valued at about \$1 billion/year) is dominated by the production of freshwater fish for human consumption. The marine aquaculture segment (about 20 percent of current production) is mainly comprised of shellfish farming, but also includes farming of finfish and algae in coastal waters and on land. Another major component of U.S. aquaculture is hatchery production to replenish stocks of important commercial, recreational, and endangered species and to restore habitat (e.g., oyster reefs). Emerging technologies include land-based recirculating systems, algal rearing technologies for production of biofuels and other non-food products, systems that integrate different types of aquaculture or combine aquaculture with other uses, and systems in exposed open-ocean waters.

Aquaculture in the United States can make major contributions to the local, regional, and national economies by providing employment and diverse business opportunities from coastal communities to the agricultural heartland. By implementing this policy and working with partners, including the Department of Agriculture, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Department of Interior, and the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture, DOC can also help to make the United States a world leader in developing, demonstrating, and employing innovative and sustainable aquaculture technologies and in encouraging worldwide adoption of sustainable aquaculture practices and systems.

### **Background**

Fisheries and seafood are important components of American life. In 2007, Americans consumed a total of nearly 5 billion pounds of seafood, which equates to approximately 16

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the term "sustainable" encompasses environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

pounds per person per year. The United States is the third largest consumer of seafood in the world and demand exceeds domestic supply from wild stocks. Currently, the United States imports 84 percent of its seafood, and about half of those imports are from aquaculture.<sup>2</sup> The current trade deficit in seafood is approximately \$9 billion. Growth of domestic aquaculture would support fishing and agricultural communities and new aquaculture-based industries in the United States.

### **Statement of Policy**

It is the policy of the DOC, consistent with the overarching National Aquaculture Act of 1980, to:

- 1) Create a business climate and technological base for industry to develop sustainable aquaculture in the United States that provides domestic jobs, products, and services while conserving aquatic resources.
- 2) Support environmentally sound and sustainable aquaculture innovation that increases the value of domestic aquaculture production and creates American business, jobs, and trade opportunities.
- 3) Advance scientific knowledge to develop and refine aquaculture technologies and methods to improve production, safeguard the environment, and sustain local food and cultural benefits.
- 4) Support the development and application of aquaculture technologies that provide economic and/or ecological value by enhancing or restoring depleted, threatened, and endangered wild fish stocks and restoring habitat (e.g., oyster reefs).
- 5) Promote a level playing field for U.S. aquaculture businesses to engage in international trade. Work to ensure that countries exporting cultured seafood products to the United States are meeting requirements relating to fair trade, food safety, and international agreements.
- 6) Work collaboratively with our federal, academic, and business partners to support the development of sustainable aquaculture.
- 7) Exchange scientific insights with other nations and promote joint participation in cooperative research that is of potential multinational value, including addressing impacts of aquaculture that breach international boundaries.
- 8) Advance public understanding of sustainable aquaculture and the associated environmental, social, and economic benefits and challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, (2009). FISHSTAT Plus: Universal Software for Fishery Statistical Time Series (Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome). Version 2.32. This figure includes both freshwater and marine production. See also U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fisheries of the United States 2009*.

## **Policy Implementation**

To implement this policy, the DOC and its bureaus will work in partnership with other Federal agencies, Congress, state, local, and tribal governments, industry, academia, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels to:

- 1) Deliver U.S. government services, such as technology transfer and trade assistance, to aquaculture and related industries in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- 2) Provide technical assistance to state and local governments to help plan and develop marine resource infrastructure needs including in coastal communities.
- 3) Accelerate the implementation of sustainable aquaculture production methods by developing pilot, demonstration, and technology transfer projects with seafood and related industries, nongovernmental organizations, state and local governments, and other partners.
- 4) Enhance the capabilities of federal research laboratories and participating research partners to provide the necessary ecological, technological, economic, and social data and analysis to effectively and sustainably develop, support, manage, and regulate private and public sector aquaculture.
- 5) Develop an efficient, coordinated, and transparent science-based permitting process and regulatory structure to ensure that marine aquaculture facilities are properly designed and sited and incorporate appropriate technologies and practices to minimize adverse impacts.

The Department of Commerce will begin to implement this policy immediately upon release of the final document. This policy will guide the Department and its bureaus actions with respect to marine aquaculture, until such time as it is amended or rescinded by the Secretary of Commerce.