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Commerce Secretary Gutierrez Applauds Congressman Rahall's Commitment to Aquaculture

Chairman of Natural Resources Committee to Introduce Bill to Promote Offshore Aquaculture

Pie, W. Va. – U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez applauded the announcement today by Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee Nick J. Rahall, II (D-WV) that he would introduce a bill, at the request of the Administration to help establish an offshore aquaculture industry. The announcement came during a tour of the Mingo County Fish Hatchery in Pie, West Virginia where the two discussed the Bush Administration's efforts to expand the \$1 billion U.S. industry into federal waters under the National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007.

"The Bush administration is working to increase aquaculture in order to meet the needs of the seafood industry as well as the growing demand of U.S. consumers," Gutierrez said. "I applaud Chairman Rahall's commitment to promote this important industry and the Mingo County Fish Hatchery in working to provide safe and abundant seafood for all U.S. communities, both coastal states and inland."

The legislation would create a regulatory framework for safe, sustainable aquaculture (fish and shellfish farming) in U.S. federal waters. The legislation includes requirements to ensure that offshore aquaculture proceeds in an environmentally responsible manner, protects wild fish stocks and the quality of marine ecosystems, and is compatible with other uses of the marine environment.

The Mingo County Fish Hatchery is one of the first projects to utilize water from an abandoned coal mine to grow and market cold water fish in southern West Virginia. In 1993, an aquaculture feasibility study revealed that the average water quality from a mine water discharge source is very close to the recommended water quality parameters for aquaculture use and a public/private partnership was formed by the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority.

Gutierrez saw first-hand how Arctic Char fish—a cold water species with significant market potential—and other fish are farmed for commercial use. He witnessed step-by-step egg incubation in hatching trays and a six-foot swim-up pond before the fish move to a grow-out farm and a processing facility. The Mingo County facility has a hatching capacity of 1.2 million eggs per year, the equivalent to more than two million pounds of saleable product per year.

With an \$8 billion seafood trade deficit, the United States is largely dependent on farmed seafood imported from other nations to meet domestic market demand. Last year, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported that half of global seafood production came from aquaculture. The legislation is important in order to meet the growing demand for seafood, help the U.S. industry better compete and reduce the need for U.S. imports.

The Department of Commerce, through its National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has invested in aquaculture research and technology over the past thirty years. The proposed legislation will bolster domestic seafood production by allowing aquaculture in the open ocean beyond three miles offshore.

In addition to creating jobs and enhancing revenue in communities, aquaculture benefits other industries, including soybean and grain producers, equipment and technology providers, seafood processors, transport, marketing, food service, veterinarians, and commercial and recreational fisherman through stock enhancement.

For more information visit: www.aquaculture.noaa.gov.

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