

Mr. Dick Monroe
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APPLYING GENERATIONAL THINKING TO OCEAN POLICY

On behalf of Darden Restaurants Inc., I would like to thank the Commission for allowing us the opportunity to participate in this most important forum.

It is a tribute to the vision of the Commission to invite Darden to this forum for exactly the reason ignored by so many; namely, that as one of this nation's largest purchasers of seafood for our family of restaurants including Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones, Darden plays a very important role in the economics and policy formation of local, national and international regulations dealing with our Oceans' resources. We do so by encouraging, supporting and rewarding good environmental and social behavior by those with whom we deal.

From our vantage, both as this country's and one of the world's most important seafood purchasers, Darden not only is affected by policies and regulations dealing with extraction of resources from the sea, but we are also in the position to encourage and in some cases, effectuate enactment of environmentally sound, social just and economically viable policies where needed around the globe. To that end, we are active participants at Convention in Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, and in each community where our Red Lobster, Olive Garden and other members of our family of restaurants are located.

In the world of international trade, the dollar speaks with a loud and authoritative voice. Darden Restaurants Inc. lives by a strict policy of purchasing our seafood only from sources that abide by the triumvirate of environmental, social and economic values so vital to the perpetuation of the sustainable use of the earth's renewable resources. I say that with deep personal conviction because I've spent the past many years circling the globe to visit present and potential sources for Darden's seafood supplies. I've been aboard shrimp trawlers along the Atlantic coast and sailed on long liners in the Gulf of Mexico. I've hoisted lobster traps off Cape Breton in the frigid North Atlantic and walked the rims of shrimp farms throughout Central America, South America and Asia, and walked the gangways of salmon net pens in Chile, Canada and the United States. And I confess to questioning my judgment while riding frail dugout canoes while visiting lobster fishermen in the roiling and perilous waters off Madagascar and Papua New Guinea.

In places like Papua New Guinea, the lure of global trade and real dollar income has allowed Darden to lay the seeds we hope will blossom into a national code of ethical fishing in order to allow that economically and environmentally blighted nation to come on line as a producer of quality seafood, taken in an environmentally sustainable manner.

We endeavor to encourage them to abandon their all too frequent destruction and degradation of coral reefs in pursuit of locally consumed crustaceans. We will do no business with a company or nation that fails to abide by the three rules of: environmental sustainability, social justice for its workers, and economic benefit for all involved in the seafood capture, raising, processing and sales process. When Darden says we do business with integrity in our intent, we are serious.

With that said, I would like to offer some observations about potential directions the Commission might consider.

First, we are here today because we all recognize that modern technology has made us the most effective and efficient extractors of the Oceans' resources in history and that, in fact, sometimes we can be too efficient. It's taken us the better part of a century to come to the full realization that, contrary to 19th Century illusions about our planet's ability to sustain an endless harvest, there are limits to what we can take and in what quantities. Unfortunately, this knowledge comes at a time when the earth's population is placing even more demands on our finite resources to produce greater amounts of food.

International bodies like the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) charged with meeting these demands for a secure world food supply are looking to the seas to augment nutrition produced on land. Of course, FAO also sees the limitations inherent in capture fisheries. That is why they consider aquaculture such an important part of providing food for the planet's growing population.

While our Oceans are no longer vast watery Commons for all to use without concern for the welfare and declining fertility of those Commons themselves, we must not be without hope or adopt a fatalistic view that precludes any use of resources from the seas. Nor can we allow ourselves to be lulled into the utopian thinking of "all we have to do is stop using our marine resources." At the end of the 19th Century and birth of the 20th, our nation found itself in a much worse situation with regard to our terrestrial wildlife resources.

Wild turkey, elk, whitetail deer, bear and others were on the verge of becoming footnotes of past days in our natural history. As a nation we rallied to the challenge. For a fleeting moment we entertained the alluring but dangerous siren of protective non-use of our wildlife with disastrous results. Today, the United States is the gem of the planet because of our abundance of wildlife wisely managed by means of the principles of sustainable use. Our fields and forests, streams and mountains are filled with wildlife precisely because those of us with the greatest hands-on interest in it joined with government to fund and manage the resource.

Our wildlife was restored to our wild places not by non-use, but by *care-filled* use.

The same formula can and should be applied to our aquatic wildlife and wild places. And, I would caution that it should be a formula that applies to recreational and commercial stakeholders alike. Of even greater concern is that, in the rush to conserve

our Ocean resources, we don't drive an equally important and historic resource into extinction, namely our fishermen and our fishing communities.

There exists a tendency to dismiss ancient and historic cultures as so much collateral damage left behind by the march of progress. Therefore, we must be extremely sensitive to the cultures and lifestyles that are at risk.

Today, the attraction of ITQs and IFQs (Individual Transferable Quotas or Individual Fishing Quotas, whichever term you prefer) is very real. Of attaching an economic value to a resource by the stakeholder, as opposed to the Tragedy of the Commons scenario that accompanies unlimited access. As with any venture, there are upsides and downsides. But the fact remains that free access to the seas is no longer an option. The idea of derby fishing and an aquatic free-for-all is coming to an end. We feel that creating a system that promises to obliterate our fishing cultures is also not an option.

Rather, I would offer an approach based on the very premise that created our country; trust in the people. If we go to an ITQ system of management, and I believe we should, I suggest that we strongly consider making it community based, not one tied to traditional fishing capacity. The latter can often tip the future of our seafood industry to economic giants squeezing out the men and women who built our seafaring heritage. The latter challenges us to integrate democracy into a viable system of economic progress. Why shouldn't the very people who live closest to and are most dependent upon the resource have the lion share of management and economic responsibility? It's a concept that has worked throughout the last century for the lobster fishermen of Maine's Monhegan Island where the waters surrounding the island have been maintained by that community's fishing families for generations, a tradition that eventually became state law. I have observed a similar model in Belize by our long time friends and suppliers who continue to prosper with careful management of their lobster resource ... not by government, but by the stakeholders themselves. There can be a number of variations on the theme, as one size will never fit all. The essence of my point is that we must use the best science, which is used to determine the resource size, harvest size, time of harvest, and the like, and combine it with those most invested socially and economically in the resource.

I might add that fishing has been determined to be the most dangerous occupation in the world, according the sources ranging from OSHA to the World Health Organization. The ITQ idea allows the fishers to choose their days of fishing, versus the derby fishing approach, and does result in saving lives.

My final recommendation is that we strongly believe we must begin to take a hard look at alternative sources of food from the sea. The days of discovering another under-utilized species are past. The most promising alternative is aquaculture/mariculture.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that aquaculture/mariculture is one of the few food production systems that offers double digit growth in the out years. Traditional agriculture methods are flat to down in production, yet modern aquaculture and mariculture have and continue to draw withering campaigns

of criticism from segments within the environmental community. Some is justified, much is fundraising bombast and hollow rhetoric. Again, I say this from personal experience because I've seen for myself the areas that are alleged to be environmental villains and I know such charges are not only groundless, but they are made by individuals and organizations that count on their listeners not having been on site, in remote areas of the world, to disprove their claims. Rather than the environmental blight claimed by self-serving and self-proclaimed environmental groups, these shrimp farming operations, as an example, are centers of environmental restoration with adjacent flourishing mangrove forests filled with indigenous wildlife. Communities that once barely survived rampant mental retardation that comes with hunger and poverty are now flourishing with equal vigor ... thanks to the schools, health clinics, and jobs created by thriving aquaculture ventures. I've been there. I've seen it.

I urge the Commission to consider recommendations of greater funding for research and development not only of a more diverse national aquaculture industry but also encourage assistance in developing foreign aquaculture ventures as a viable means of assisting emerging nations to alleviate hunger and poverty. Today, throughout the world great strides are being made in farming a variety of shell and fin fish species. Species such as redfish, cod, cobia, tripletail, and tuna should join the ranks of salmon, shrimp, mussels, scallops, rainbow trout, crawfish and catfish for aquaculture ventures.

Clearly, land and labor for such aquaculture enterprises is an issue for the United States, yet we can greatly assist and provide leadership in developing the technology and high standards for sustainable, high quality aquaculture efforts that can be shared with other nations.

Today, with the exception of sport, we rarely go "hunting" for our land based protein, nor do we go "gathering" for our fruits and vegetables. It is only evolutionary that the same model be seen in our oceans. We stopped hunting and gathering on our land not that long ago. We domesticated relatively few animals and slightly more plants and have done quite well feeding the billions of people on the planet from such a relatively small food base. Darden's vision is that the oceans are next for moving away from hunting and gathering into the next phase of ranching and farming.

Some would paint the picture that we are considering such alternatives because we are running out of fish or shellfish. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yet the time has come to take the next step. Our ancestors did not move from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age because they ran out of stones. The transition was made when innovation and technology availed itself to allow the next step in the development of our civilization. Today we have the science and technology to transition to more ranching and farming of our marine resources. Such a move will take pressure off of the wild resources, which will in turn assist their recovery in concert with an investor-based management scheme as is offered by the ITQ idea. The result would be a win for aquaculture and a win for our wild resources. And certainly a win for our fisher cultures.

Very specifically, and here at home, I firmly believe the combination of increased farming of nature's own water purifiers, bivalves such as oysters, clams, scallops, etc. and the application of biotechnology advances to develop native strains of oysters resistant to disease can restore once great national treasures from the Chesapeake Bay to Tampa Bay.

Darden Restaurants Inc. firmly believes in and adheres to a philosophy of cooperation among all of the Oceans' various stakeholders. In order to maintain our ability to do business and to sustain our reputation as the world's most popular and environmentally responsive casual dining restaurant entity, Darden has adopted a corporate policy whereby we play an active local, national and international role in implementing a strict standard of environmental, social, quality and economic integrity in our dealings with our customers, our suppliers and our planet.

Our ability to do business in an environmentally sustainable manner affects the lives and livelihood of literally millions of people in the United States and throughout the world. We encourage and applaud our country's efforts to help those in economically blighted locales to follow our Nation's example of building a better life for themselves, their families and their countries through participation in global trade.

We only urge this Commission that whatever policy recommendations arise from these deliberations that they safeguard the same aspirations of our own people so that together we can enjoy the benefits of the earth's terrestrial and aquatic natural resources for many generations to come. You might think this last statement is a bit lofty; it is not, it is business-based for my company. Darden's mission is simply "to be the best in casual dining, now and for generations." Generations, not quarterly, or yearly.

We strongly encourage generational thinking. It is a business and resource imperative.

Darden thanks you again for this opportunity.