

July 28, 2006

Dr. William T. Hogarth
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway, 14th Floor
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Dr. Hogarth:

At our request, the NOAA Aquaculture Program presented its draft *10 Year Plan for the NOAA Marine Aquaculture Program* at our recent meeting in Seattle. The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) believes that the plan makes a compelling case for the development of sustainable marine aquaculture in the United States and we recommend that NOAA, in cooperation with the Department of Commerce and other federal agencies, implement this plan.

As key advisors to the agency, MAFAC believes that there is an obvious need for the United States to become more secure in the production of seafood from marine aquaculture and apply as appropriate aquaculture technology to the enhancement and rebuilding of native marine stocks. However, the committee recognizes that there are socioeconomic and environmental concerns associated with aquaculture and will support NOAA in its efforts to ensure that marine aquaculture develops in a predictable, environmentally compatible and sustainable manner.

MAFAC submits the following specific recommendations for your consideration, support and action.

- **Formally Adopt the *10 Year Plan for the NOAA Marine Aquaculture Program* as a NOAA Plan.**
- **Provide Substantially Increased Budget Resources for Aquaculture and Institutionalize Aquaculture within NOAA and the Department of Commerce**
 - to implement a regulatory framework, increase the agency's aquaculture science capabilities, and work with partners on pilot and demonstration projects;
 - to create a headquarters and field organizational structure for marine aquaculture comparable to other major NOAA Fisheries programs;
 - create a NOAA Fisheries line item dedicated for aquaculture program activities to place specific emphasis on aquaculture within the agency; and
 - to provide additional funding without compromising other agency programs.

- **Launch a Broad Marine Aquaculture Development Initiative in the United States that will Lead to Greater Levels of Seafood Production**
 - The Secretary should convene a National Summit on Marine Aquaculture in conjunction with the Secretary of Agriculture to launch a broad-based marine aquaculture initiative that will identify specific milestones and actions to increase the production of seafood from marine aquaculture and to enhance commercial and recreational fisheries.
 - The new marine aquaculture initiative should include a wide range of partners to develop an integrated framework of regulation, science, research, monitoring, infrastructure support, education, outreach and economic incentives in order to advance the development of aquaculture in the United States.
 - NOAA should work with states and other regulatory authorities in the development and dissemination of best practices in aquaculture regulation to ensure consistent, efficient and effective management of systems in an environmentally safe manner.

- **Revisit Chapter 22 of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's *Final Report to Congress for Elevation of Additional Aquaculture Recommendations to the U.S. Ocean Action Plan.***

MAFAC believes that an increased domestic aquaculture industry can and should contribute to more resilient coastal communities with a more diversified economic base. Other benefits include:

- maintenance of existing seafood infrastructure;
- creation of new business opportunities for the U.S. grains and feed industry, nutrition products, equipment manufacturers, food processing and other service industries;
- increased availability of safe, healthy seafood for consumers;
- greater regional food supply and security; and
- restoration of depleted and endangered species and habitat.

If NOAA does not adopt and implement these recommendations, the nation will continue to lose an important economic and environmental opportunity, while fisheries-dependent coastal communities lose their market niche and infrastructure as more seafood buyers turn to imported aquaculture products to meet market demand. In addition, seafood prices will likely increase as other countries consume more and export less, making the health and nutritional benefits of seafood less affordable to Americans. Though this may not foreshadow a national crisis in the same way dependence on overseas oil causes concern, it will mean economic and conservation opportunities forgone and fewer economic options for the nation in the long-term.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our recommendations. Be assured that MAFAC's goal is to help NOAA make aquaculture a priority. We will continue to focus on aquaculture and

look forward to receiving more detailed information on your progress in implementing the four action items listed in this letter.

As always, we are available for further consultation as you contemplate a course of action.

Sincerely,

Tony DiLernia, Committee Liaison
MAFAC

Tom Billy, Chair
MAFAC, Commerce Subcommittee

Cc: MAFAC Committee Members (e-mail)
Dr. Jim Balsiger
Dr. Michael Rubino