

Protect the Gulf from Dirty and Dangerous Industrial Fish Farms

In September 2007, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council released a draft of an amendment that would streamline the permitting and regulation of offshore aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico. This draft fails to adequately address significant threats that offshore aquaculture can pose to consumer health, the marine environment, and coastal communities.

Concerns for Coastal Communities

- The development of offshore aquaculture in the Gulf could depress fish prices and negatively impact commercial and recreational fishermen and women.
- The draft amendment fails to prohibit aquaculture in fishing grounds, routes to these grounds, vessel traffic lanes, military sites, and other areas of significant economic or public value.
- It fails to require that a portion of aquaculture profits go back to the public for marine conservation and other uses.
- It fails to require the use of the best available cage technology to prevent fish escapes, and to withstand severe weather and predators such as sharks.
- It allows for the culture of endangered and threatened species, and species of concern such as Nassau grouper. The escape of fish from cages and spread of disease from farmed to wild fish could disrupt these at-risk fish populations.
- It fails to prohibit aquaculture in marine reserves and other areas with fragile or important habitat, such as coral reefs.

Consumer Health Concerns

- The draft amendment allows for the use of federally approved antibiotics, hormones, antifoulants, and pesticides in offshore aquaculture. Other agencies' guidelines might not be sufficient protection regarding use of such substances in aquaculture.
- It fails to require testing of fish feed for contaminants such as PCBs, dioxins, and mercury, which can accumulate in the flesh of farmed fish.
- The draft amendment fails to establish stringent standards to prevent or mitigate potential pollutant releases. Water flowing out of fish farms can carry excessive nutrients, particulates, metals, antibiotics, pesticides, and other chemicals.

Oil Rigs to Fish Farms

- The draft amendment fails to prohibit aquaculture on or near oil platforms, which are not appropriate substitutes for the best available technology to withstand severe weather conditions.

Environmental Concerns

- The draft amendment fails to cap aquaculture operations' use of feed containing fishmeal and fish oil produced from wild fish. It can take two to six pounds of wild fish, such as Gulf menhaden, to produce one pound of farmed fish. These forage fish, which are prey for a variety of fish, birds, and mammals, are a vital component of the Gulf marine ecosystem.

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