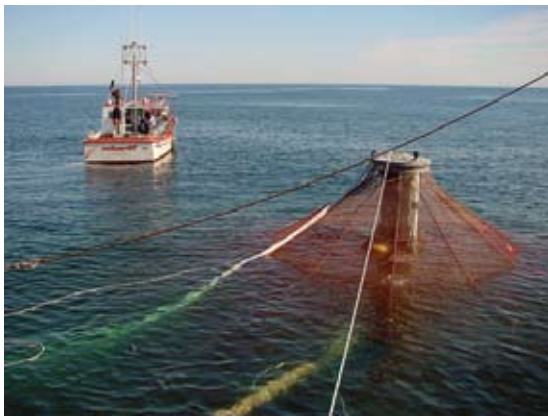


A Fishy Story

Ocean Fish Farming Can Really Hurt Fishing Communities

For centuries, Alaskan fishermen have caught salmon. Their communities thrived along with the abundant seasonal runs of healthy fish. It was exciting to be a salmon fisherman, making a living spending days on the water and enjoying the competition with the fish.



Ocean fish farming threatens wild fish and could harm the livelihood of small fishermen.

But in the 1980s, this way of life began to change. Big companies decided to try to make money by producing salmon the same way as cars — industrially — and they created “salmon farms.” Giant, ugly cages, packed with fish, began to pop up along the coast. The cages became home to parasites, diseases and pollution and wild salmon began to suffer. Fishermen noticed that some of the fish they caught were sick or even different — escaped farmed salmon had started reproducing in the wild. As the number of farms grew, many fishermen started getting less money for their catch. The big companies added too many fish to the market and drove down the prices for historical fisherman. Coastal communities began to suffer as fishermen went into debt or were forced to find new work.

Today, fisherman and coastal communities in the Gulf could be at risk of going the way of those that caught Alaskan salmon, if the Gulf Council approves a plan that would allow a new form of industrial farm fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. Offshore fish farming — sometimes referred to as open ocean aquaculture or ocean fish farming — uses large cages to grow fish in bulk. Important species such as snapper and grouper that fishermen currently target in the wild could be farmed. Like salmon, an increase in farmed fish could mean lower prices for wild fish of the same species. Reduced prices are only one concern. Farmed fish also need to be fed and to do that, wild prey species are caught and made into fish food. Prey species are already in danger of being overused for fish farming. Removing even more of them from the ocean means less food for the wild fish, and ultimately less wild fish for fishermen to catch. The plan for the cages does not restrict where they can be placed. At a commercial scale, many cages would be grouped together, and they could be placed in popular fishing spots. Everyone in the community could be impacted if this new industry is introduced in the Gulf.

The Gulf Council is having meetings on how this plan will affect fishermen and coastal communities before it is approved. They will be held in Key West on July 21 and in Key Largo on August 13.

Call Christina at (202) 683-2495 or visit www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish/floridakeys for more information.

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