

# H.R. 574: Protecting our Oceans, Coastal Communities and Consumers from Ocean Factory Fish Farming

Fact Sheet • July 2011

Ocean factory fish farming, also known as open ocean aquaculture, involves growing marine fish in cages and net pens in the ocean.<sup>1</sup> These facilities threaten coastal and fishing communities, consumers, and the health of our oceans. A new piece of legislation<sup>2</sup> would put the brakes on efforts by government agencies to expand this unsustainable industry into federal waters, generally located three to 200 miles offshore.<sup>3</sup>

## What's wrong with Ocean Factory Fish Farming?

Like factory farms on land, ocean factory fish farms are generally big, dirty and dangerous.

**Bad for the environment:** Uneaten fish feed, fish waste and any antibiotics used in the operation flow through the cages directly into the ocean.<sup>4</sup> This can significantly harm the ocean environment.<sup>5</sup> Caged fish can escape and compete for resources<sup>6</sup> or interbreed with wild fish and weaken important genetic traits.<sup>7</sup> Open ocean salmon, cod and trout farms had nearly six million fish escape between 2001 and 2009 in Norway alone<sup>8</sup>—not an example we want to follow in U.S. waters. Farmed fish can also spread disease to wild fish.<sup>9</sup>

Factory fish farms also tend to grow top-of-the-food-chain carnivorous fish that require large amounts of protein in their diet.<sup>10</sup> That protein generally comes from small wild fish—like herring and sardines—that are extracted in large quantities from the ocean and processed into feed.<sup>11</sup> In some cases it can take over six pounds of wild fish to produce one pound of farmed fish.<sup>12</sup> Taking fish out of the ocean to feed farmed fish can undermine the marine food chain by reducing a food source for wild fish.<sup>13</sup> Soy is also being extensively added to feed, with unknown effects on wild fish physiology and reproduction.<sup>14</sup>

**Bad for communities:** Factory fish farms may interfere with the livelihoods of commercial and recreational fishermen by displacing them from traditional fishing grounds<sup>15</sup> or harming wild fish populations. By flooding the market with cheap fish that were produced en masse, factory fish farm-

ing can drive down prices for wild fish, putting fishermen out of business and fishing communities in peril.<sup>16</sup>

**Bad for our health:** Fish produced at factory fish farms can have higher levels of contaminants than wild fish, which may lead to elevated cancer risks for consumers.<sup>17</sup> And use of antibiotics on fish farms can cause drug-resistant bacteria to develop which may be passed on to humans.<sup>18</sup>

## Who Supports Factory Fish Farms?

Pressure to develop an ocean factory fish farming industry has come from multiple directions. In addition to fish farming corporations, support to open U.S. federal waters to these operations is coming from the copper industry<sup>19,20</sup> as well as the soy industry that hopes to provide raw materials for fish farms.<sup>21</sup> The oil industry could also benefit from the leasing of their old unused rigs to support fish cages, much like the rigs to reefs program, which allows the industry to avoid many of the costs of removing equipment.<sup>22</sup> Since the second Bush administration, these industries have largely held sway over the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the very agency tasked with conserving and managing our oceans. After two unsuccessful attempts at national legislation supported by the agency,<sup>23</sup> NOAA released a new federal policy in June 2011 to promote easier permitting for ocean factory fish farms.<sup>24</sup>

## Protecting our Oceans and Ourselves

In response, Representative Young of Alaska has introduced H.R. 574 to protect our oceans, coastal communities and

consumers from the reckless development of the factory fish farming industry in federal waters.<sup>25</sup> To do this, it would prohibit the Secretary of Interior and the Secretary of Commerce from authorizing factory fish farm operations in federal waters without Congress giving them the express approval to do so.

Quite simply, H.R. 574 puts the brakes on NOAA's efforts to fast-track development of the factory fish farming industry.



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## Charting the Future

Multinational corporations have forever changed the way food is grown on land—to the detriment of public health, the environment and local communities. H.R. 574 can help us avoid the same mistake in our oceans and help ensure a more sustainable future for the marine environment, coastal and fishing communities and consumers.

Please ask your representative to support H.R. 574 and stop the reckless development of factory fish farming in our federal waters.

To help us protect our oceans, coastal communities and consumers, go to [www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish) for more information.

## Endnotes

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- 19 Ocean Stewards Institute. "Members List." <http://www.oceanstewards.org/members.html>
- 20 Ocean Stewards Institute. "Issues." <http://www.oceanstewards.org/issues.html>
- 21 "Soybean farmers increase support for aquaculture." *The Times and Democrat*. June 9, 2011.
- 22 "Oil platforms may be used for fish farms: Bush administration proposal could help with trade deficit." *Associated Press*. April 5, 2005; Dougall, David. "Platforms and Fish Pens – An Operator's Perspective." Section 2: Industry Perspectives, Feasibility Studies and Rigs to Reefs in Joining Forces With Industry: Proceedings Third International Conference on Open Ocean Aquaculture May 10-15, 1998, Corpus Christi, Texas at 39-43.
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### For more information:

web: [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)

email: [info@fwwatch.org](mailto:info@fwwatch.org)

phone: (202) 683-2500 (DC) • (415) 293-9900 (CA)

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