



**Clarification:** The previous email we sent out (as seen below) was merely a FYI for our membership and friends of the domestic shrimping industry. The information came from our friend Marianne Cufone [mcufone@environmentmatters.net](mailto:mcufone@environmentmatters.net). This letter is a work in progress and any input should be directed to Marianne directly.

Currently the Southern Shrimp Alliance does not have a formal position on this issue, we are currently constructing one with input from our Board of Directors and membership. The below article is not our position on this issue, our goal is merely to put information out there that might be of interest to one or some of our members.

We apologize for any and all confusion that this email caused.

**Do you love the ocean? Do you care about clean water and healthy wildlife? Then you NEED to get involved with what could be the biggest threat to our oceans in many years the development of large scale commercial fish farming in Gulf of Mexico ocean waters!**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is the federal agency tasked with taking care of our ocean wildlife, and they are selling out to foreign big business! NOAA is creating plans to divide up and rent out our oceans to private, often foreign-based companies so the companies can make money by growing fish in large pens and cages in our waters. This is called "ocean fish farming", "offshore aquaculture" or "open water aquaculture". Whatever name that is used, it could create major problems if there are no strict standards in place before operations begin. Open ocean fish farming already is happening in some places with big problems:

- Aquacultured fish are often different than wild fish, behaviorally and sometimes even genetically. Fish in cages out in open water can escape through damage to cages from severe weather, hungry predators, or even human error. These fish could introduce diseases and/or interbreed with wild populations, thus changing both natural fish and the environment.
- Fish farms often have disease problems because there are so many fish in one place and they are stressed. The diseases can spread to wild populations because they are in the open ocean.
- Antibiotics and other chemicals used to treat both the fish and their cages to keep them free of organisms can spread beyond the immediate enclosures and pollute the surrounding environment.
- Most aquacultured fish are carnivorous, and need to eat other fish, such as squid, sardines or menhaden, in some form to survive and grow. Marine mammals, birds, and other wild fish depend on the availability and abundance of such prey for their own survival.
- The cage netting and anchor lines pose entanglement hazards to boats and marine wildlife such as sea turtles, dolphins, or other fish.
- During storms, the cages can break apart, releasing fish, food, wastes and more, creating marine debris and damage to fragile habitat.

As you read this, NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) are developing a plan to allow ocean fish farming specifically in OUR REGION! This plan is being hurried along to get it passed

As you read this, NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) are developing a plan to allow ocean fish farming specifically in OUR REGION! This plan is being hurried along to get it passed before people realize what is happening - did you know that the Gulf Council is taking comments from the public about it this and next week?

The current Gulf Council plan for ocean fish farming is written in such a way that it highlights the importance of economic benefit and minimizes dealing with potential serious ecological impacts. The charge of the Gulf Council and NOAA is to conserve and manage our marine resources for the benefit of the nation, not to primarily benefit private investors.

The plan DOES NOT:

- Make clear that non-native and genetically modified species are prohibited for use in ocean fish farming - fish that are not like those in our waters will escape from the facilities and remain in our waters, causing unknown problems.
- Prevent farming of endangered or threatened species and species of concern - these species are already in trouble, if farmed versions of these animals escape it could destroy the natural population forever.
- Protect essential habitat and fishing grounds by requiring buffer zones around special or fragile places - the plan currently allows for buffer zones around the facilities instead, to prevent people from fishing near them!
- Require compensation for use of public resources for private profit - they use our waters and they get all the money!
- Have strict environmental requirements about pollution and harm to habitat and wildlife - right now any specific standards are being left to NOAA (the agency pushing this) for later rulemaking.
- Prevent using oil rigs for aquaculture - during the violent storms in recent years, oil rigs were destroyed, some even being carried miles to shore. Had aquaculture existed on these rigs at the time of the storms, there would have been massive releases of captive fish, feed and other pollutants directly into ocean waters. Rigs weren't made for aquaculture!
- Talk about how increasing aquaculture can hurt other marine wildlife - prey species like menhaden fish are taken to use in feeds for farmed fish, more aquaculture means taking more prey fish, leaving less food for our natural wildlife!

These are all very important matters that MUST be in the final version of the plan. PLEASE speak out about the need for strict standards for ocean fish farming and write a personal letter to the Gulf Council. The oceans belong to everyone and we need our government to manage them for the benefit of us all. If you want to read the entire plan, it can be found at:

<http://www.gulfcouncil.org/Beta/GMFCWeb/Aquaculture/Aquaculture%20Amendment%20PHDraft%200707.pdf>

Not many people get involved in natural resources management processes, so just a few comments from a few people really make a big difference in determining outcomes.

Here are is an example of what you could write:

Dear Gulf Council:

I am a resident of (enter state here) and I am very concerned about the development of commercial ocean fish farming in the Gulf of Mexico. I am very disappointed that the Gulf Council is now rushing through a plan for ocean fish farming without being considerate of ecological matters. It is the Council's charge to conserve and manage

considerate of ecological matters. It is the Council's charge to conserve and manage our marine resources for the benefit of the nation, not to primarily benefit private business. The current plan is all about money, not about protecting our resources.

**In particular, I am worried that the Council plan does not:**

- Make clear that non-native and genetically modified species are prohibited for use in ocean fish farming
- Prevent farming of endangered or threatened species and species of concern
- Protect essential habitat and fishing grounds by requiring buffer zones around special or fragile places
- Require compensation for use of public resources for private profit
- Have strict environmental requirements about pollution and harm to habitat and wildlife
- Prevent using oil rigs for aquaculture
- Talk about how increasing aquaculture can hurt other marine wildlife by using more prey species in feed

These are all extremely important issues that must be addressed before any aquaculture permits are even considered in the Gulf of Mexico. Allowing NOAA Fisheries to make regulations piecemeal in the future for environmental standards does not protect our public resources and the people that rely on them. I strongly urge the Council to review your developing plan for ocean fish farming very carefully before moving forward. There is no reason to rush through this process.

Sincerely,

(Name)

(Address)

**Please send your letters to:** The Gulf Council · 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100 · Tampa, FL 33607

**and/or e-mail:** [gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org)