



MEDIA ADVISORY: UNH Scientist Testifies Before U.S. Congress On Offshore Aquaculture

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Dr. Richard Langan, director of the University of New Hampshire Open Ocean Aquaculture Project and expert in the field of offshore aquaculture development, testified before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee's National Ocean Policy Study Subcommittee during its Offshore Aquaculture Hearing today. Subcommittee Chair U.S. Senator John Sununu (R-NH) invited Langan to testify. A summary of Langan's written testimony follows. The complete written testimony is available online at <http://www.unh.edu/news/docs/langan.html>.

Summary Testimony Regarding U.S. Offshore Aquaculture Richard Langan, Director, University of New Hampshire Open Ocean Aquaculture Project April 6, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the future of offshore aquaculture in the United States. My name is Richard Langan, and I am the director of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Open Ocean Aquaculture Project. This testimony reflects my work in offshore aquaculture research in New England, and my experience as a commercial fisherman, oyster farmer, and seafood business owner.

It is clear that commercial wild fish populations cannot sustain the level of exploitation once thought possible. It is equally clear that as demand for seafood increases, our capacity to meet that demand will be directly related to our ability to farm fish. Global seafood production from aquaculture has increased dramatically, and now accounts for 40 percent of world supply.

The U.S., however, has not kept pace with the growth of this industry. As a result, 70 percent of the seafood we consume is imported, generating annual trade deficits that now exceed \$8 billion. The time has come for us to choose whether we want to remain a nation reliant on seafood imports, or become one actively engaged in developing a sustainable, marine aquaculture industry.

At UNH, I am part of a team of university researchers, fishermen, and aquaculturists who explore the environmental soundness, technical feasibility, and economic viability of farming finfish and shellfish in exposed ocean environments. We have established a 30-acre field site, six miles off the coast in New Hampshire State waters, where we raise native finfish species in submersible cages and native shellfish on submerged longlines.

Eight years of research and development, environmental monitoring, and economic

assessment have led us to conclude that a U.S. offshore aquaculture industry holds great promise, provided it is conducted in a way that safeguards the environment and is consistent with the goals of sustainable ocean management. This optimism is supported by the success of commercial operations in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and abroad.

However, we also recognize that for this industry to succeed, significant technical and operational challenges must be addressed. For example, we must integrate and automate production systems to assure efficiency and worker safety; develop more secure containment systems to minimize fish escapement; identify sustainable sources of fish feed ingredients; and delineate the conditions most conducive to fish health and growth.

These challenges underscore the need for a strategic, comprehensive program of research and technology development and demonstration that can guide offshore aquaculture development and insure its environmental stewardship. This is a strategy that has served U.S. agriculture well—one that combines research conducted at universities and government laboratories with a network of demonstration sites that apply new technologies and demonstrate their usefulness to the end user.

As proposed, the National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2005 offers an excellent regulatory and procedural framework on which to build a sustainable industry. What the Act now requires is the input of informed stakeholders. As a scientist immersed in developing solutions to the technical, social, environmental, and economic hurdles that face offshore aquaculture, I believe that Act should authorize a research and development (R&D) program to support and guide this fledgling industry. Independent, scientifically verified R&D will make the difference between a successful industry and a struggling one, between one that harms the environment and one that is engaged in systematic environmental protection.

It is clear the world will not wait for us in this matter. Offshore aquaculture is being developed in the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia. And in some instances, this has been with the benefit of U.S. research and technology development. I do not believe we should relinquish the fruits of our investments to other nations without first exploring their potential in this country. Nor do I believe that we should rely solely on other nations to develop and regulate an offshore aquaculture industry that will impact the environmental quality of our oceans and the health of U.S. consumers.