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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New Report Documents Efforts to Privatize Ocean for Fish Farming**

### **Regulatory Agencies/Industry Work Behind the Scenes to Open the Door**

Minneapolis - The aquaculture industry is working along with U.S. regulatory agencies to privatize parts of the ocean on behalf of corporate fish farming interests, according to a new report by a coalition of consumer and environmental groups.

Open ocean aquaculture (OOA) is the practice of fish farming 3-200 miles off the American coast. Various government agencies; most notably National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, as well as Sea Grant programs and private companies, are currently in the process of aggressively pursuing OOA development.

Currently there are experimental and demonstration off shore fish operations going on in Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, and Texas. Fish involved in these projects are high value species including: red drum, amberjack, summer flounder, cod, halibut, red snapper and cobia. Commercial operations are already underway in Hawaii and Puerto Rico

Later this year, the NOAA is expected to submit its "offshore aquaculture bill" to Congress that will set up a policy framework for the widespread commercialization of OOA operations. If the bill is passed by Congress it could green light not only a brand new giant bio-polluting industry, but a wholesale privatization of the Continental Shelf and an end to public stewardship over the oceans, the report concluded.

The report outlines possible environmental risks associated with offshore aquaculture including: fish escapes, transference of disease to wild fish, discharge of sewage, and unsustainable use of marine resources.

"By law, the sea and seabed are 'held in the public trust', and 'conveyance of exclusive private use rights' is not allowed," said Dr. Mike Skladany, Marine and Fish Conservation Director at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. "Altering this precedent could open up similar opportunities to a raft of competing corporate interests. Oil and gas drilling, sub-sea mining, abandonment of oil rigs, waste disposal and commercial rocket launching are just some of the activities that would benefit from such a redefinition, and there is mounting evidence that a wholesale privatization of the continental shelf, may be in the offing."

A major motivation behind the push for OOA is the growing opposition to coastal fish farms and tough state regulations. By locating off shore, fish farming operations could escape state control. For example, it would be possible to locate farms three miles off Alaska, though it has banned fish farming to protect its hugely productive marine eco-system, or raise genetically engineered fish three miles off California, Maryland or Washington State despite their ban on these organisms.

The report calls for a moratorium on commercial OOA development until national aquaculture legislation is adopted and comprehensive, open and transparent regulations are formalized. These regulations should include:

- A mandatory set of national standards for Open Ocean Aquaculture.

- OOA permits issued only after conducting a rigorous environmental impact statement that is consistent with the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and at least a 60 day public comment period.
- No part of the water column or bottom-lands anywhere in the 3-200 miles offshore zone to be de facto privatized.
- Leases/permits to be temporary, and renewable only if in compliance with strict environmental regulations.
- Environmental impacts from net-pen culture regulated by adopting regulations and developing technologies that eliminate as fully as possible; fish escapees, disease transfer to wild fish, depletion of global fish stocks for farm raised fish feed, and discharges of waste.
- Indigenous peoples' free access to their lands and territories fully ensured.

The report was authored by the Offshore Aquaculture Working Group, which includes Ben Belton, Mike Skladany and Anne Mosness, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis. Jeremy Brown, Food and Society Policy Fellow, Bellingham, Washington.

Read the executive summary and full report at: [www.iatp.org/fish](http://www.iatp.org/fish)

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