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June 6, 2018

To: Members of U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources

RE: Opposing development of marine finfish aquaculture in the United States

Dear Senator:

Industrial marine finfish farming poses serious risks to our oceans, coastal communities, and public health. We represent a variety of stakeholders, industries, and organizations who rely significantly on a healthy ocean ecosystem. We write today on behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and activists to urge you to protect our oceans and oppose any legislation to develop marine finfish aquaculture in the United States.

We collectively represent: fishers, chefs, and seafood suppliers who need clean and healthy oceans to provide quality, nutritious seafood for our customers; tribal nations who hold the ocean ecosystem and its inhabitants as sacred; nonprofit organizations who fight to protect our environment; academics and researchers who study ocean health and conservation; and coastal communities and businesses who depend heavily on the ocean for our livelihoods and wellbeing.

Industrial ocean fish farms have no place in our waters. They cram thousands of fish into enormous floating net pens and cages, exposing wild fish stocks to pests and disease and risking massive farmed fish spills that further threaten wild fish. These operations use assorted pharmaceuticals and toxic chemicals to treat disease and control infestations, which end up in our waters and can negatively impact nearby marine life. The chemicals can also contaminate the farmed fish, raising public health concerns for consumers.

The untreated waste from these facilities pollutes our ecosystems, creating chemical disruptions that can contribute to dead zones and algal blooms in our oceans. And every year these operations attract and oftentimes result in the deaths of wild dolphins, seals, birds, schooling fish, and other marine animals. This industry also poses serious occupational hazards for workers, and has been classified as one of the most dangerous jobs in the U.S.

These industrial farms are built on the factory farm model, which aims to produce the largest quantity of food at the lowest possible cost. This forces all seafood prices downward, lowering the amount consumers may be willing to pay for responsibly and sustainably harvested fish. This directly harms our fishing communities. The massive operations also privatize our public waterways, barring access to limited marine space that could otherwise be used for fishing, boating, tourism, and other activities that bring more value to coastal communities than industrial ocean fish farming.

The dangers associated with industrial ocean fish farms have been documented for decades. In spite of this, Congress is again considering rewriting the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a law intended to protect and conserve our oceans and fisheries, in a way that will allow and encourage faster development of industrial ocean fish farms.

We join together to strongly urge you to protect our marine environment, sea life, existing industries, and our health. Please do not allow any changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act that would aid development of marine finfish aquaculture. Such an addition would be irreconcilable with a law that is explicitly meant to protect us and our oceans.

Sincerely,

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