

Fact Sheet for the Domestic Seafood Production Act of 2024

This bipartisan bill seeks to strengthen our nation's seafood system and protect our nation's coastal communities from the economic and ecological threats of offshore fish farming, while also providing these communities with the portside infrastructure needed to process plentiful fresh seafood (wild-caught finfish and shellfish) and mariculture product (farmed shellfish and farmed seaweed) to sell to local and regional markets.

Industrial offshore fish farming causes ecological and economic harm to our coastal communities, especially to fishermen and mariculture producers who live and work there. Factory-scale marine fish farming, wholly distinct from other forms of responsibly-sited-and-scaled aquaculture on land or nearshore, harms wild fish populations and other marine wildlife via polluted water, incubation and spread of diseases, use of toxic chemicals, and fish escapes. Its poor track record is well-established within Washington and Maine state waters, and in industrialized countries like Canada, Denmark, Argentina, and Norway – whose governments are either changing policy or taxation to discourage or ban this method of fish farming.

This legislation would reaffirm the 2020 U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that held that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) lacks the legal authority to regulate aquaculture in federal waters (*Gulf Fishermen's Ass'n v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv.*, N. 19-30006, 2020 WL 4433100, (5th Cir. 3 August 2020)). Yet there are portions of the federal government that still actively promote development of floating factory farms, using taxpayer money, to the detriment of all others who depend upon a healthy ocean. For example, NOAA is ignoring the aforementioned court order and dutifully abiding by a Trump-era executive order to designate so-called "Aquaculture Opportunity Areas" to facilitate offshore fish farming in Gulf of Mexico and other Federal waters. Yet public comments reveal overwhelming opposition by the people who live and work in these coastal communities, and there is no act of Congress that authorizes NOAA to permit aquaculture facilities in U.S. Federal waters in the first place.

In addition to protecting our communities from distant and foreign corporations that seek to take over the food supply chain and exploit our oceans, this legislation also provides these communities with economic development opportunities and an exciting pathway toward a more sensible and community-centered food system. Currently, *U.S. processing* for domestically consumed seafood does not meet the needs of our small-to-mid-sized coastal commercial fishing industry. For example, fish landed on the U.S. west coast and Alaska may be sent to China for processing, only to be re-imported to the U.S. for sale. We must re-shore these processing jobs. Even within the U.S., seafood may be sent to a distant locale because of a lack of processing options closer to home. This convoluted supply chain adds unnecessary costs and carbon miles to a fish that could have been caught, processed, and consumed locally.

This legislation sensibly prioritizes economically distressed coastal communities that are most in need of such facilities. Finally, it would allow for more Americans to affordably enjoy healthy, locally-sourced seafood in a way that reduces transport-related carbon emissions, reduces reliance on imported seafood, and protects the health of the marine environment.