



September 26, 2002

Mr. James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Chairman,
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

Dear Mr. Watkins:

Thank you for giving the U.S. Aquaculture Society (USAS) and World Aquaculture Society (WAS) an opportunity to present written and oral testimonies to the Commission. Dr. Craig Browdy (President of WAS) and myself (President of USAS) are providing below answers to the questions raised by the Commission in the letter dated August 7, 2002. Food production, including seafood production, should be a high priority to the U.S. and its safe and responsible development should be strongly promoted in U.S. ocean policy.

- 1) Should the Federal Government promote aquaculture development in the U.S., or is the proper role for the Federal Government to set standards to protect the environment and human health, providing a predictable, understandable regulatory framework for the industry?

Response: The federal government should and must perform a dual role both in promoting responsible aquaculture and in developing, administering and enforcing reasonable regulations. Internationally, federal governments are among the strongest promoters of domestic aquaculture development. Federal governments, particularly in countries where the needs for food security and economic development are greatest, have realized the opportunities presented by responsible aquaculture development. In developed countries as well, many federal governments have promoted aquaculture development based upon the realization that aquaculture in general and mariculture in particular can represent an important means of diversifying economic opportunities in coastal communities.

In the U.S., the federal government plays a huge role in promoting and supporting U.S. agriculture. Aquaculture represents one of the fastest growing sectors of agriculture offering tremendous new opportunities for assuring a safe and secure source for domestic production of high quality protein for the American consumer and for export. Seafood consumption in the U.S. has increased over time and preferences for marine species continue to be pronounced. Promotion of responsible marine aquaculture development in the U.S. should be a high priority based upon the growing U.S. trade deficit in this area, currently second only to petroleum in size.

The U.S. government is currently among the most advanced in the regulation of aquaculture. At present, major initiatives are underway to effectively regulate aquaculture effluents and to better regulate aquatic animal health in terms of disease control and improving availability of safe and effective therapeutants. It is crucial that these efforts be based on transparent, participatory processes, which include input from all stakeholders and are based upon sound science.

- 2) Is there a need to consolidate Federal responsibility for aquaculture under one agency and, if so, what would be benefits?

At present, there are many varied aquaculture related activities, programs, authorities and jurisdictions spread throughout numerous agencies in several government departments (primarily Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce). There are many good programs included which can do much to contribute to responsible development of marine aquaculture in the United States. Aquaculture is a diverse activity involving many different parts of the federal government and as such consolidation under one agency would likely not be in the best interest of the industry or the American people. Currently, by statute, aquaculture coordination occurs in a unique body: the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture (JSA) chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture. The JSA includes vice-chairs from Commerce and Interior and an executive secretary. The JSA has effective national working groups and task forces addressing important aquaculture issues. The JSA should be supported and strengthened with full-time staff to support national aquaculture priorities. Central coordination could be significantly improved by designating a lead individual or office in each department to coordinate the broad and diverse activities in this sector within each department and to act as a liaison through the JSA between departments. This would improve effectiveness and coordination while reducing redundancy to better coordinate national aquaculture policy development and implementation.

Again, thank you for allowing us to provide input into the decision-making process. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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