William R. "Bill" Martin, Jr.   President
Blue Ridge Aquaculture
555 Industrial Park Drive
Martinsville, VA   24114

April 21, 2009

Written Testimony for HR 669 "Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act"
Committee on Natural Resources
US House of Representatives

Blue Ridge Aquaculture is a pioneer in Recirculating Aquaculture Systems. We have been in uninterrupted operation since 1993, and have the largest recirculating aquaculture system in the world. Our facilities include tilapia and shrimp production in Martinsville, Virginia, cobia production in Saltville, Virginia, salmon and trout production in Logan, West Virginia, and tilapia production in Egypt. We currently employ over fifty people, with the potential to employ hundreds more. HR669, in its current form, will force us to close operations in the US, and move operations out of the country.

With closed system aquaculture, our intent is to be as environmentally friendly as possible. This is in contrast to offshore net-pen aquaculture. In offshore net-pens, it is virtually impossible to prevent escapees. Furthermore, offshore net-pens expose highly concentrated densities to the natural environment, resulting in inevitable outbreaks of disease and parasites that are easily spread to nearby local species. In our systems, the species we grow are under complete control from broodstock to shipment to market. Through closed systems, we can prevent disease from entering the system, eliminating the need for antibiotics. We use no hormones or artificial stimulants of any kind. These systems allow for up to 98% water re-use. With our ongoing research and development of waste water treatment facilities, we can begin to commercialize the waste as a nutrient source for feeds, in the production of algae for biofuels, or as raw material for methane production. We have invested heavily in alternative foods for all our species in an effort to reduce the amount of fish meal and fish oil we use, further reducing pressures on wild fish stocks.

In the United States, we currently import over 80% of our seafood, but grow nearly all of our beef, poultry and pork. Not only is this large trade imbalance a burden to the US economy, but also exposes the US consumer to unsafe seafood products, contamination from antibiotics or industrial pollutants, and bioterrorism.   Our system eliminates these problems.

We clearly recognize problems in the industry that need regulation. We are currently regulated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, and the FDA regarding any chemical use. Unlike open water systems, there is no possibility of escapees or predation, preventing the possibility for invasive species from entering our local ecosystem. We

are working with a number of universities and federal agencies in research and development of all current and future species.

It seems apparent that the enforcement of the current laws could solve many of these problems. Any new legislation and/or regulation should be targeted at the specific issues, not painting with such a broad brush that would negatively affect existing operations that are focused on sustainable, environmental operations.

I have been asked by the National Aquaculture Association and the American Tilapia Association, both of which I am a member, to introduce letters in opposition to this bill.

As written, this bill clearly inhibits growth of the seafood industry in the United States. We would like to see regulation that encourages the growth of the US domestic seafood supply.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify,

Sincerely,
William R. "Bill" Martin Jr.
President
Blue Ridge Aquaculture

Attachments:
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Tilapia Permit
Virginia Marine Resources Commission Cobia Aquaculture Permit
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Rainbow Trout and Atlantic Salmon Permit
Department of the Interior, US Fish and Wildlife Service Permit
American Tilapia Association (ATA) Letter
National Aquaculture Association (NAA) Letter