

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony of
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United States Department of Agriculture
Before the House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans
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Concerning H.R. 2908

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Agriculture's views on H.R. 2908, a bill "To promote international trade and interstate commerce in the broodstock and seedstock of domesticated salmonid by authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to provide diagnostic and certification services to reduce the risk of transmission of diseases associated with domesticated salmonid."

H.R. 2908 would require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, in cooperation with the private aquaculture industry, a comprehensive program to provide diagnostic and certification services; establish health criteria; and monitor, evaluate, and facilitate the elimination of impediments to commerce of domesticated salmonid broodstock and seedstock. In addition, the Secretary would be authorized to prevent the introduction or dissemination in interstate and international commerce of any contagious, infectious, or communicable disease and promote export of salmonid broodstock and seedstock using certain existing authorities. The authorities cited are known collectively as the animal quarantine laws. The bill would also establish an advisory committee and require the Secretary to certify the health status of domesticated salmonid seedstock intended for export.

The Administration would support passage of the draft bill if it were amended to address the concerns noted below. We recognize that the involved Federal agencies still have work to do to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities in the area of aquaculture and we will continue to work toward that end through the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture and other appropriate means. We also recognize that there is interplay between commercial aquaculture production and natural resources. The Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service has statutory responsibility for protecting much of this Nation's natural resources and they must continue to fulfill that role. Any new authority in the area of commercial aquaculture production must allow for FWS' role in conserving natural resources to continue unimpaired and must acknowledge the need for all Federal agencies to achieve appropriate coordination. We believe this is a positive and achievable goal and we are committed to it. In fact, the legislation specifically preserves the responsibility of the Departments of Commerce and Interior. To address any potential issues of overlap, the legislation should be amended to require appropriate coordination between Federal agencies, and to clarify their respective responsibilities. In addition, we recommend that the Committee consider the addition of user fee authority for certain import, export, and diagnostic services, which would make the authority consistent with existing authority for other animals.

USDA and the Department of Interior have had similar authority for animals for many years. For example, we regulate the importation of animals to prevent any health threat to livestock or poultry production while the Department of Interior regulates the importation of animals that could present any risk to natural resources. These activities have been carried out without any difficulties and coordination needs are addressed on a case-by-case basis.

The Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for protecting the health of American agriculture by preventing the entry into the United States of destructive pests and diseases, controlling and eradicating pests and diseases that do become established in the United States,

and providing certain health certification services to ensure that animals moving in interstate and international commerce present no significant health risks. In most cases, our authority to carry out these activities is limited to livestock and poultry species. However, we do have authority to provide a limited range of services to the commercial aquaculture industry. For example, APHIS provides animal health certification for private commercial aquaculture intended for export. In addition, APHIS regulates the manufacture of veterinary biological products for aquaculture species and protects commercial aquaculture from depredation caused by other species such as cormorants.

Based on our expertise in animal health issues and the health delivery infrastructure we have in place nationally, we believe we are well positioned to provide a wide range of health services to private commercial aquaculture species. This legislation, by relying on the authority under the animal quarantine laws, would extend to the private salmonid broodstock and seedstock industry the same range of services that APHIS now provides to the livestock and poultry industries. We believe it is critical to provide these services to protect the health of the domestic industry and facilitate interstate and international trade. However, we recommend that the legislation be expanded to include all domestic commercial aquaculture species. In addition, although we believe that industry participation and support for health programs is essential, we do not believe it is necessary to establish an advisory committee by statute. If an advisory committee is necessary, sufficient authority exists to establish one under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. There are also other avenues by which we can gain public participation and input that are more efficient and cost-effective and we would like to explore some of these options with the industry..

The Department recognizes that other Federal agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have roles and responsibilities in the protection of natural aquatic resources and in import and export certification of fisheries products as well as in processed product inspection. We have a great deal of experience in coordinating agricultural health programs with related activities of other agencies. One example of this would be our noxious weed control activities, in which we coordinate with agencies such the Department of Interior and the Department of Defense. We are committed to working with all other agencies that are involved in aquaculture issues to ensure effective programs for the protection of both natural resources and commercial production.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing sector of U.S. agriculture with an annual farm gate value of over \$800 million, and global demand for aquaculture products is increasing dramatically. As export markets continue to expand, other countries are looking to the United States to establish a comprehensive national health program to support our export certification activities. This legislation has the potential to provide much needed protection to a growing industry and will help maintain a healthy product and facilitate trade.

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