

The Honorable Mike Ezell (MS-04)
Testimony before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Member Day Hearing on Priorities in the 118th Congress
November 2, 2023

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

As the Congressman representing South Mississippi, I want to thank you for the opportunity today to discuss my priorities, including bipartisan legislation that would support meeting the demand for fresh, American seafood. The Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture (AQUAA) Act (H.R. 4013), which I introduced alongside my colleagues from Florida and Hawaii - Representative Kat Cammack (FL-03) and Representative Ed Case (HI-01) – offers the chance to enhance the U.S. seafood supply with more sustainable, locally grown seafood by establishing national certainty for the offshore aquaculture industry.

Coastal states like mine need new ways to revitalize their working waterfronts. The expansion of offshore aquaculture would create new opportunities throughout the seafood supply chain, including in seafood processing and retail, among others.

Mississippi is the nation's fourth-largest seafood supplier, providing fresh, delicious seafood to restaurants and consumers across the Gulf Coast and our nation. However, states like mine have even greater potential to create jobs that deliver high-quality American seafood to our plates if opportunities in aquaculture are embraced, such as sustainable farming in open-ocean waters. Unfortunately, due to confusing rules and an expensive permitting process, our nation's aquaculture industry has been unable to unlock this potential, particularly in federal waters.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries of the United States report, the U.S. ranks 17th in global seafood production. It also indicates that approximately 80% of the seafood we consume is imported, with more than 50% of it being farm raised. We understand that the demand for seafood is growing, and it's unlikely that wild capture fisheries alone can meet this demand and remain sustainable. Therefore, we need to raise our own seafood through responsible offshore aquaculture, just as we do with our other food sources.

The AQUAA Act would help achieve this goal by establishing a comprehensive nationwide permitting system for marine aquaculture facilities and for the management of these facilities in the Exclusive Economic Zone, thereby clarifying the regulatory process to support the growth of American aquaculture.

Aquaculture, in complement with wild harvest, will ensure a consistent supply of local seafood regularly coming into our nation's ports - such as the ones in Mississippi's Fourth Congressional District- creating new job opportunities, and serving as an economic engine for coastal

communities. It also provides our hardworking fishermen with an opportunity to supplement their livelihoods.

The U.S. can lead in sustainable seafood if Congress supports offshore aquaculture, ensuring that U.S. wild-caught and farmed seafood continues to be an important part of the global food supply. Let's put our working waterfronts to good use to feed America with sustainable, locally sourced seafood. I respectfully urge the Committee to support the AQUAA Act and pass legislation that would enable offshore aquaculture to expand into federal waters.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate your time today and I look forward to working with you all to address food security and the economic needs of our nation.