

R. Chris Stock, President
Stronger America Through Seafood, Inc.



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May 8, 2025

Representative Hal Rogers
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Grace Meng
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Rogers and Ranking Member Meng,

Stronger America Through Seafood, a coalition of industry partners representing the seafood supply chain, is working in support of increased U.S. production of healthful, sustainable, and affordable seafood. We are writing today to request that you support \$19 million for the Office of Aquaculture and \$5 million for the Aquaculture Cooperative Institute within NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), robust funding for the National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science within NOAA's National Ocean Service, and \$18 million in funding for the Sea Grant Aquaculture Research program in NOAA's Oceanic and Atmospheric Research in the fiscal year 2026 Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Appropriations Act.

We also request the language below be included in the related Explanatory Statement: "The Committee recognizes the significant potential for development of American offshore aquaculture to increase U.S. production of healthful, sustainable and affordable seafood. As the fastest growing food production sector in the world, responsible aquaculture development presents opportunities for meaningful economic growth in coastal communities and among their supply chain partners, while ensuring that Americans have access to responsibly farmed local seafood. The National Marine Fisheries Service Aquaculture program's 5-Year strategic plan for aquaculture will support a U.S. aquaculture industry as part of a competitive domestic seafood sector. The Committee fully supports the activities of the Aquaculture Program and includes \$19,000,000 to implement this strategic plan, including continued work on Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, environmental assessments, science-based tools and modeling and increased economic development programs."

Open ocean aquaculture is widely recognized by the scientific community as one of the most environmentally sustainable ways to produce protein. Aquaculture has become the fastest growing food production sector in the world, responsible for nearly all global seafood supply growth since the 1990s.

While aquaculture is used widely around the world to complement wild harvest, it remains an untapped industry here in the U.S. We thank the President for his executive order in this term and his previous term that are intended to expand aquaculture and strengthen our nation's seafood industry.

The U.S. currently ranks only 18th in aquaculture production globally and imports up to 85% of its seafood – half of which is estimated to come from aquaculture in other countries. The single biggest reason is the lack of a clear regulatory pathway for permitting new projects, particularly offshore in open ocean waters. This challenging reality has forced many American businesses to invest in other countries.

The expansion of aquaculture in U.S. federal waters presents a unique opportunity to build an American seafood industry that can support working waterfronts with infrastructure investments and jobs, enhance sustainable ecosystems and guarantee healthful, locally sourced protein for American consumers.

As you may know, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)'s Aquaculture Program continues to actively coordinate across agencies towards a comprehensive regulatory foundation for aquaculture. This process includes siting analysis for future Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) in federal waters, interagency coordination on National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), development of science-based tools and modeling, and associated economic development programs like workforce training and community planning that will ensure the economic benefits of aquaculture are realized across all stakeholder groups.

Further, the Fiscal Year 2024 CJS Appropriations bill provided for a new Cooperative Institute (CI) to support the sustainable development of aquaculture in the U.S. to address the seafood import deficit and benefit the economy. The CI will help the agency fulfill the tenets of the NOAA Aquaculture Strategic Plan. We strongly support the launch of the CI in 2025 without delay.

We believe a funding level of \$19 million for the Office of Aquaculture and \$5 million for the CI will adequately support the sustainable development of aquaculture in the U.S., address the seafood import deficit, and benefit the economy.

In addition, we fully support the work of the NCCOS for its role in the development of the AOAs and the coastal planning tools it offers to assist managers, planners, and industry with sustainable aquaculture development.

Finally, we seek \$18,000,000 for Sea Grant Aquaculture Research. SATS supports this program for its critical work to develop and commercialize new technologies for finfish aquaculture and to engineer ocean-based infrastructure. Sea Grant conducts research and provides technical

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assistance and outreach to aquaculture producers, resource managers, scientists, and consumers to ensure the safety and quality of sustainably cultured seafood products. We believe this program makes critical progress in helping achieve the goals laid out in the President's recent Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

We also support adequate staffing at NOAA, which is currently under a hiring freeze. With the agency's staff currently down 30% due to vacancies and retirements, ensuring these positions are filled is essential to the development of a stronger American seafood industry.

By prioritizing domestic aquaculture, you will support the growth of an American seafood community that is resilient to economic and climate changes and is part of a holistic approach to a greater sustainable food strategy, as well as help achieve the President's goal, laid out in his executive order, of making the United States "the world's dominant seafood leader."

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure domestic aquaculture production is a priority now for a secure future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Chris Stock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." and last name "Stock" clearly visible.

R. Chris Stock, President
Stronger America Through Seafood