The National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007

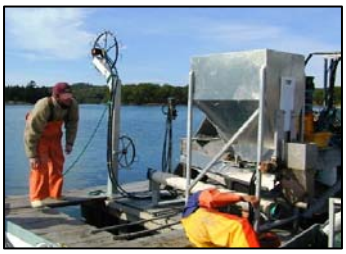
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce, is working to enhance/increase domestic seafood supply to meet the growing demand for all seafood products. Currently, over 80% of the seafood Americans consume is imported, and at least half of those imports are farmed seafood. Additional U.S. aquaculture can help the nation reduce its $8 billion seafood trade deficit, provide additional jobs and revenue for coastal communities, and meet the growing consumer demand for safe, healthy seafood.

Right now, most U.S. marine aquaculture products come from shellfish, which are grown onshore or in coastal areas. However, new technology and equipment, and the promising results of open ocean aquaculture demonstration projects in state waters, are leading to opportunities for seafood farming further from the coast, in federal waters three to 200 miles off shore. The federal waters of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone cover 3.4 million square miles of ocean and hold promise for this new type of aquaculture.

While there are many potential benefits to offshore aquaculture, there are also barriers blocking the expansion of aquaculture into federal waters. Currently, there is no clear authority for the permitting of offshore aquaculture in federal waters. To address this challenge, the Administration will propose the *National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007* early in the 110th Congress. If enacted, the Act will establish the legal framework regarding permits, enforcement, and monitoring of aquaculture in federal waters.

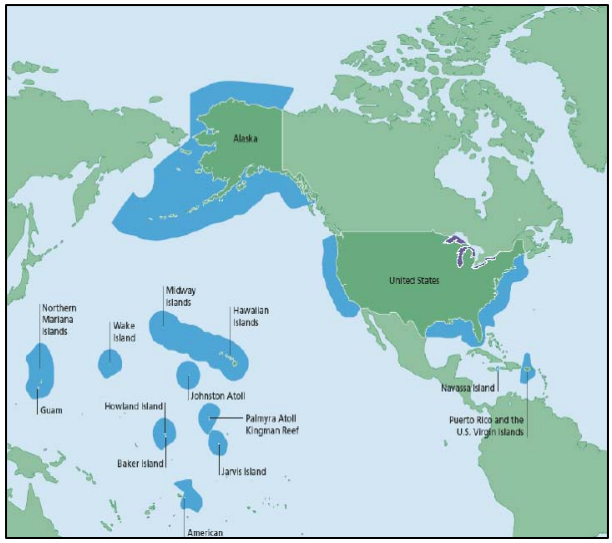
Specifically, the bill will:

- Authorize the Secretary of Commerce to issue offshore aquaculture permits.
- Require the Secretary of Commerce to establish environmental requirements.
- Require the Secretary of Commerce to work with other federal agencies to develop and implement a streamlined and coordinated permitting process for offshore aquaculture.
- Exempt permitted offshore aquaculture from fishing regulations that restrict size, season and harvest methods.
- Authorize the establishment of a research and development program for marine aquaculture.
- Authorize funding to carry out the Act and provide for enforcement of the Act.

Photos (left to right) depict blue mussels being harvested from the University of New Hampshire Open Ocean Aquaculture Project; new mussel seeding equipment developed by UNH; a submersible cage sitting on the surface in Hawaii; and Pacific threadfin (moi) harvested from a commercial open ocean farm in Hawaii. [UNH, NOAA, and Cates photos]

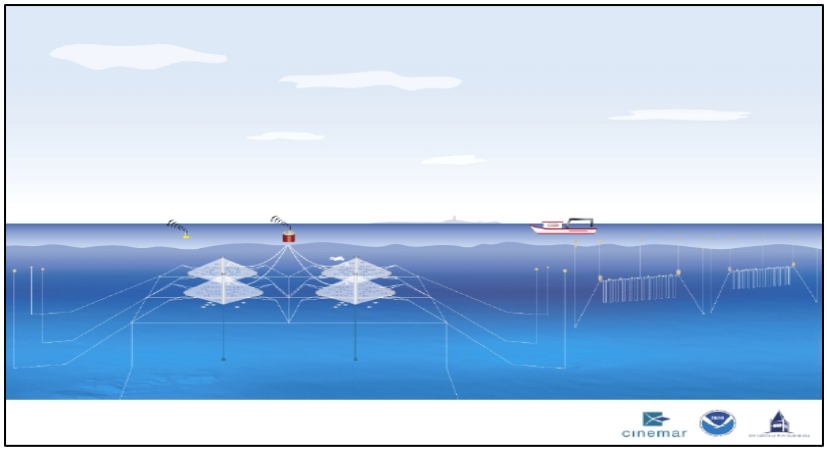
The 2007 proposal includes requirements to ensure that offshore aquaculture proceeds in an environmentally responsible manner that is consistent with stated policy to protect wild stocks and the quality of marine ecosystems and is compatible with other uses of the marine environment. The intent of the Act is to complement rather than supersede existing resource management authorities, so it specifically provides for coordination and consultation with other federal agencies, Fishery Management Councils, and coastal states.



In addition, the research and development provision of the act would authorize NOAA to fund the scientific research and the technology development necessary to help all types of domestic marine aquaculture to expand.

On a broad scale, the proposal will provide the necessary regulatory certainty to facilitate expansion of aquaculture in federal waters, where there is significant potential for development of the U.S. aquaculture industry. New technologies have been developed to better withstand extreme conditions of the offshore ocean environment, allowing this expansion to occur. By adopting these technologies, the United States can boost production of valuable marine species while creating jobs that contribute to economic development and the revitalization of depressed coastal communities. Additional domestic supplies of nutritious seafood can reduce pressure on wild fisheries. By adopting rigorous environmental standards for aquaculture, the United States can establish its leadership in development of sustainable uses of marine ecosystems, as an example for our trade partners, while leveling the playing field for U.S. fishery products.

Because of competing uses, community interest, and ocean conditions, offshore aquaculture will be better suited to some areas of the country than others. However, the most immediate challenge is to establish clear rules to allow this type of aquaculture and, ultimately, allow the nation to take advantage of this new opportunity for seafood production in federal waters. At the same time, the federal government must ensure that human health, the marine environment, and wild stocks are protected.



The schematic to the left depicts the submerged rope culture system for blue mussels located alongside submerged fish cages in the Gulf of Maine. [*University of New Hampshire's Atlantic Marine Aquaculture Center image*].

Highlighted in blue in the map above, the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone ~ also known as federal waters ~ covers 3.4 million square miles of ocean. [*U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy map*].