

**Opening Statement**  
**Chairwoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo**  
**Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife**  
**Wednesday, September 9, 2009**  
**Oversight Hearing on Offshore Aquaculture**

Approximately eighty percent of seafood consumed in the United States is imported, and half of those imports come from aquaculture. Offshore aquaculture, or the propagation and rearing of marine species in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, could increase domestic seafood production as well as provide new employment opportunities for coastal communities that currently rely on declining wild fisheries.

However, offshore aquaculture is a young, untested industry and has the potential to harm the marine environment and native fish populations, as well as conflict with other ocean uses. Given the scientific uncertainty over the potential impacts from offshore aquaculture, a comprehensive, national offshore aquaculture regulatory framework with stringent environmental standards is needed to provide the certainty and environmental safeguards necessary to sustainably guide this use in federal waters.

A comprehensive approach, however, may be easier said than done. Last week, the Gulf of Mexico Regional Fishery Management Council's aquaculture fishery management plan—which would create a regional, fragmented approach to offshore aquaculture regulation—took effect with the tacit approval of NOAA and the Secretary of Commerce. Many Members of Congress, including myself, had urged disapproval of the plan because of the risks of this piecemeal approach and the clear lack of authority to regulate offshore aquaculture through the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Plainly, offshore aquaculture is not fishing, and it makes no sense to regulate it as such.

Still, the plan has now been approved with a promise from NOAA to develop a national aquaculture policy that may or may not be consistent with the Gulf plan. One has to wonder, then, why the agency would let the plan go forward if it is committed to a comprehensive approach as a “national policy” would imply.

I look forward to hearing from them on that point today and from all the other witnesses regarding the necessary components of a comprehensive, federal regulatory framework that should be in place before offshore aquaculture development takes place, and I appreciate their recommendations on how offshore aquaculture can be conducted responsibly, balancing both commercial and environmental concerns.