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Wicker, Schatz, Rubio Introduce AQUAA Act to Advance American Aquaculture

September 25, 2020

U.S. Sens. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., today introduced the bipartisan Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture (AQUAA) Act of 2020 to establish national standards for sustainable offshore aquaculture. The bill would designate the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as the lead federal agency for marine aquaculture. The legislation would also direct NOAA to harmonize the permitting system for offshore aquaculture for farms in federal waters, and direct the agency to lead a research and development grant program to spur innovation throughout the industry.

“Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector, but the U.S. lacks a comprehensive, nationwide system for permitting in federal waters,” said **Wicker**. “This deficiency prevents the development of aquaculture farms, leading to more seafood imports. Our legislation would establish national standards for offshore aquaculture, enabling U.S. producers to create jobs and meet the growing demand for fresh, local seafood.”

“Hawaii leads the nation in modern and traditional aquaculture practices,” said **Schatz**. “With this bipartisan bill, we can expand aquaculture opportunities, opening suitable federal waters for responsible growers. It will create new jobs, spur economic growth in our coastal communities, and ensure our oceans are managed sustainably now and in the future.”

“Marine aquaculture presents an enormous opportunity for Florida’s economy and for the food security of our nation,” said **Rubio**. “I am proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation, alongside Senators Wicker and Schatz, that would streamline the rules for this important industry and responsibly promote its success.”

Aquaculture refers to the farming of fish, shellfish, and algae in water for food. Over 90 percent of the seafood in the United States is imported, 50 percent of which is derived from aquaculture. Currently, there are no active aquaculture farms in U.S. federal waters.

The Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture Act would:

- Uphold existing environmental standards while providing regulatory certainty and clarity to the industry;
- Include a set of national standards to guide development of offshore aquaculture, and aquaculture management plans that implement those standards on a regional scale;
- Include a national plan to identify and establish areas particularly well-suited for aquaculture, similar to the President’s recent Executive Order on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth;
- Establish an Office of Marine Aquaculture within NOAA, which would be charged with coordinating the federal permitting process;
- Establish a permit through NOAA that would give an individual the security of tenure necessary to secure financing for an aquaculture operation; and
- Fund research and extension services to support innovation and the growth of aquaculture in the United States.

Click [here](#) to read the bill.

<https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2020/9/wicker-schatz-rubio-introduce-aquaa-act-to-advance-american-aquaculture>

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