

The SEAfood Act

Science-based Equitable Aquaculture Food Act

Sponsored by: Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC), Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA)

The Science-based Equitable Aquaculture Food Act (SEAfood Act) charts a responsible path forward for growing healthy, sustainable seafood offshore in the United States. The bill catalyzes studies and on-the-water demonstration projects to assess best practices to minimize risk while laying the groundwork for future efforts to create an equitable and inclusive seafood economy for all Americans. Those efforts will lay the strong foundation needed to develop an offshore aquaculture industry that produces more seafood in the U.S. and supports good jobs, including in vulnerable coastal communities.

Why Now?

Up to 90% of the seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported - half of that is from aquaculture. More and more Americans want their seafood to be locally harvested, but the U.S. lacks a comprehensive federal regulatory framework with the strong standards needed to ensure offshore aquaculture develops responsibly and is sustainable in the long term. This regulatory absence has left the U.S. aquaculture industry vulnerable to regulatory regional inconsistencies, resulting in lawsuits, stymied investments, and lost job and market opportunities. The U.S. is also being left behind as other countries continue to expand and export their seafood production.

But to move forward, we must address outstanding uncertainties about offshore aquaculture to ensure we establish strong standards from the start. This includes examining significant questions about environmental safety and sustainability for farming shellfish, seaweed, and finfish offshore, as well as opportunities and implications of a new, offshore industry for local communities and existing ocean users.

What Does the SEAfood Act Do?

The legislation will:

- Charge the Government Accountability Office with producing a report that details permitting, monitoring, and regulatory options for governing offshore aquaculture in the U.S.;
- Direct the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to complete a study on the scientific basis for efficient and effective regulation of offshore aquaculture;
- Authorize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to create an offshore aquaculture assessment program that prioritizes research and transparency using on-the-water projects that cultivate native species and are operated in partnership with land and sea grant institutions; and
- Create a grant program, under NOAA, for minority-serving educational institutions to establish aquaculture centers of excellence that meet the needs of a growing domestic and sustainable aquaculture industry that includes developing or enhancing undergraduate and graduate aquaculture curriculum, career development, and extension programs.