

CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

P.O. Box 40002 • Olympia, Washington 98504-0002 • (360) 753-6780 • www.governor.wa.gov

April 11, 2011

Susan Bunsick, Policy Analyst
Aquaculture Program
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East-West Highway
SSMC No. 3, 13th Floor, Room 13152
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Bunsick:

I write to share my comments on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Draft Aquaculture Policy, released February 2011, which I believe speaks to the core issues currently facing this important industry. I applaud NOAA's commitment to expanding aquaculture while safeguarding our nation's living marine resources and for taking the lead on a science-based path forward at the national level.

Aquaculture has a long history of contributing to the economy, culture and environment in Washington's coastal communities. For example, the shellfish industry plays a central role in establishing water quality protections for Puget Sound and has sustained many of our coastal economies during the recent recession. We continue to seek ways to expand aquaculture opportunities and provide more certainty for the industry, while protecting other resource based-economies, recovering endangered species, and ensuring healthy and resilient marine ecosystems.

It is encouraging that the Draft Aquaculture Policy's purpose and priorities reflect those of Washington State. We recently adopted state provisions that address geoduck aquaculture in nearshore areas (Chapter 173-26 Washington Administrative Code). While the five-year process was challenging, it resulted in a balanced approach that relies on adaptive management and emerging science.

We currently support Washington Sea Grant's Geoduck Research Program and are particularly interested in funding for science-based best management practices for shellfish aquaculture and interagency coordination of permitting processes. Both would directly benefit our state's desire to support and enhance our aquaculture industry and sustain our valuable natural systems.

I believe the next step is to put the policy into practice. I am aware of the National Shellfish Initiative proposed by the Pacific and East Coast Shellfish Growers Associations and the Gulf Oyster Industry Council and support their efforts to turn policy into reality.



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Again, I commend NOAA on the leadership and thoughtfulness that went into developing a policy that seeks to promote economic prosperity, while protecting essential ecosystem functions. We look forward to supporting its implementation in our state.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor