

Food & Water Watch ◇ **Sierra Club** ◇ **Downeast Salmon Federation** ◇
The Center For Food Safety ◇ **Louisiana Shrimp Association** ◇ **Environment Matters** ◇
Environment Florida ◇ **National Coalition for Marine Conservation** ◇
Institute for Fisheries Resources ◇ **Planning and Conservation League** ◇
Ocean Conservation Research ◇ **Go Wild Campaign** ◇ **Ocean Conservancy** ◇ **Clean Catch** ◇
Downeast Lobstermen's Association ◇ **Greenpeace USA** ◇ **Alaska Marine Conservation Council** ◇
Mangrove Action Project ◇ **Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Associations** ◇
Environmental Defense Center ◇ **Alaska Center for the Environment** ◇ **Gulf Restoration Network** ◇
Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association ◇ **Pacific Marine Conservation Council** ◇
Puget Sound Harvesters Association ◇ **United Commercial Fishermen's Association**

MMS Alternative Energy and Alternate Use Programmatic EIS
Argonne National Laboratory
EVS/900
9700 S. Cass Avenue
Argonne, IL 60439

**Re: Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for
Proposed Alternative Energy and Alternate Use Program, 72 Fed. Reg. 13307-13308
(March 21, 2007)**

Submitted via email on May 21, 2007

Dear Mr. Chris Oynes:

We, the undersigned consumer, conservation, and fishing organizations, submit this letter to urge the Minerals Management Service to drop its apparent plans to allow fish farming in federal waters and apparent plans to permit energy companies to abandon their old, unused platforms.

MMS's draft programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) suggests that the agency plans to permit and regulate fish farming – also known as aquaculture – that uses offshore energy platforms. We are very concerned about offshore aquaculture, which involves raising finfish, such as cod, halibut, and red snapper, in often large, crowded cages where fish waste and chemicals flush straight into the open ocean. Increased forage-fish use for aquaculture fishmeal could have wide-ranging environmental and socioeconomic impacts, reducing the amount of fish available for larger fish, marine mammals, and seabirds. Up to six pounds of wild fish can be ground up to feed one pound of farmed fish. Further, fish farms can introduce escaped non-native fish species that compete with and spread disease to wild fish populations. Damage to the farms from storms is one way that farm raised fish can escape. For example, in the late nineties, storms destroyed an offshore aquaculture test cage placed adjacent to an energy platform in the Gulf of Mexico.

We hope that the agency is not using this rulemaking to bypass Congress as it considers the merits of offshore aquaculture legislation. The 2005 Energy Act only gives MMS the authority over “authorized” marine-related uses. Congress has not specifically authorized offshore aquaculture and has yet to consider a current offshore aquaculture bill. Because marine aquaculture could significantly harm the environment, human health, and the economies of local fishing communities, and because the large amount of resources and specific regulatory expertise that would be needed to adequately address these problems, we believe MMS should prohibit energy platform use by commercial offshore aquaculture facilities.

We are also concerned that MMS's PEIS states that it considers an "artificial reef" an alternate use of platforms subject to its jurisdiction, thus suggesting it intends to create a federal abandonment program. This would be a radical change from current law, which requires energy platforms to be removed, or "decommissioned," after they stop producing oil and gas except when they become part of a state's "rigs to reef" program. We are concerned about the long-term contaminating effects the rigs may have on the marine environment, including as a result of storms. There is also little evidence that the platforms, acting as "artificial reefs," actually result in larger, healthier fish populations. Finally, recent reports have shown a connection between oil and gas rigs and elevated mercury levels in surrounding sediments and fish. We oppose any plans to allow energy companies to avoid paying the costs of removing their rigs, estimated to be \$9.9 billion from 1985-2020, when nothing in the 2005 Energy Act gives MMS such new authority.

For these reasons, we urge MMS to drop these apparent plans and reissue its PEIS.

Sincerely,

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