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## Markey eyes fishing, opposes NOAA aquaculture

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--- — One of the two Democratic congressmen announced as seeking the state's vacant U.S. Senate seat is urging the Commerce Department not to expand its jurisdiction to regulate aquaculture at a time "when it is failing its core fisheries mission to restore wild stocks, like cod, haddock and flounder."

U.S. Rep. Edward J. Markey of Malden, who, along with Congressman Stephen Lynch of South Boston, has declared for the special election race to fill the seat long held by John F. Kerry, wrote to Acting Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank to advise against any NOAA approval of a pending proposal to regulate a future aquaculture farm in the Gulf of Mexico under the terms of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

"Congress did not intend for NOAA to regulate aquaculture as a fishery under the (Magnuson-Stevens Act)," Markey wrote. "I share the skepticism of fishermen in my home state of Massachusetts over NOAA's ability to take on this additional responsibility."

Under outgoing NOAA administrator Jane Lubchenco, the agency has begun emphasizing aquaculture in the U.S., which is a bit player, producing less than \$1 billion in product value in a \$70 billion global market. Gloucester, in the early days of the last century, had an experimental cod aquaculture facility on Ten Pound Island.

"Aquaculture has great potential to create economic growth and jobs in coastal communities while increasing the supply of domestic seafood in the U.S.," Markey wrote to Blank. "It always has the potential to negatively impact existing wild fisheries, harm the marine environment, and concentrate profit and power in the hands of a few large corporations, to the detriment of fishing towns like Gloucester, New Bedford and Chatham that are simply struggling to survive."

Markey added that he was anticipating a decision this week by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, one of eight established under directive by Congress in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, request that its parent NOAA permit and regulate offshore aquaculture operations.

In arguing against a precedent-setting decision not intended by Magnuson, Markey observed that the law requires "NOAA to prevent overfishing, rebuild depleted fish stocks, designate and protect essential fish habitat: three actions that make no sense in the context of an aquaculture industry where fish are private property even before they are harvested."

"Fish farming — which involves selectively breeding, feeding, growing and harvesting captive fish from crowded enclosures to maximize profit — is oceans away from fishing, which entails capturing wild fish from a functioning ecosystem at a rate that maximizes sustainable harvest over time," Markey wrote.

The U.S. now imports more than 90 percent of its seafood, the bulk of it generated by aquaculture, and that has led to a \$10 billion trade deficit in seafood.

There is no offshore fish farming in the U.S. at present, though growing oysters and other bivalves has proved successful in many estuaries of Massachusetts. Most domestic aquaculture is located inland involving catfish and tilapia. Shellfish farming in Massachusetts was a \$17 million sector in 2011.

Gloucester dabbles in facilitating the growth of softshell (steamer) clams, with volunteers gathering and relocating “spat” from the beds of the Annisquam and Essex River systems, according to the city’s shellfish warden.

Globally, however, the U.S. barely makes the top 10, with American aquaculture production not only behind China’s, but also — in order — India’s, Vietnam’s, Thailand’s, Bangladesh’s, Japan’s, Chile’s and Norway’s.

Constraining U.S. aquaculture are forces similar to those that have made the nation the global leader in wild harvesting conservation, and lifted America’s fisheries to the cusp of general sustainability — goals of the fishing industry and the environmental movement alike.

But the aquaculture revolution arrived in the U.S. too late for the kind of dynamic expansion that has occurred in third world waters, and with America’s coasts developed with homes and harbors, centers of commerce and fishing, the constituency for aquaculture is over-matched.

While Markey and Lynch have declared for the special Senate election, Republicans got their first confirmed candidate Thursday, when state Rep. Daniel Winslow of Norfolk formally joined the fray. But State Minority Leader Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, is also pondering a run, with plans to announce his decision by Monday.

The race, which leads to primaries on April 30 and a June 26 general election, also includes, Beverly Libertarian candidate Daniel Fishman, who drew 16,000 votes in last fall’s 6th District congressional race won by incumbent John Tierney over challenger Richard Tisei.

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