118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. ______

To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish an assessment program for commercial-scale offshore aquaculture through demonstration projects, to establish Aquaculture Centers of Excellence, to support aquaculture workforce development and working waterfronts, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. SCHATZ introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on ______________

A BILL

To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish an assessment program for commercial-scale offshore aquaculture through demonstration projects, to establish Aquaculture Centers of Excellence, to support aquaculture workforce development and working waterfronts, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Marine Aquaculture Research for America Act of 2025" or the "MARA Act of 2025".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

SEC. 2. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to authorize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish and study commercial-scale demonstration projects to answer scientific questions needed to safely and sustainably regulate offshore aquaculture in the United States;

(2) to commission a study and report to assess the environmental and regulatory viability of a United States offshore aquaculture industry;

(3) to support aquaculture workforce development and working waterfronts by creating new jobs and to support existing jobs and businesses within the seafood industry of the United States, including jobs and businesses for traditional participants in the fishing industry;

(4) to establish Aquaculture Centers of Excellence to meet the needs of the growing domestic sustainable aquaculture industry; and

(5) to reduce the United States seafood trade deficit by expanding the domestic supply of seafood through the production of sustainable offshore aquaculture.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) ADMINISTRATION.—The term ''Administration'' means the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

(2) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term ''Administrator'' means the Administrator of the Administration.

(3) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS.—The term "appropriate committees of Congress" means—

(A) the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, the Committee on Environment and Public Works, and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate; and

(B) the Committee on Natural Resources, the Committee on Agriculture, and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives.

(4) AQUACULTURE.—The term "aquaculture"—

(A) means any activity involved in the propagation, rearing, or attempted propagation or rearing, of cultured species, including the capture and rearing of broodstock; and

(B) does not include the practice of—

(i) capturing juvenile finfish to rear to maturity in an aquaculture facility for subsequent commercial sale; or

(ii) the practice of rearing and releasing cultured species for the purpose of enhancing wild populations.

(5) AQUACULTURE STAKEHOLDER.—The term "aquaculture stakeholder" means—

(A) an owner or operator of an offshore aquaculture facility;

(B) a Regional Fishery Management Council established under section 302(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1852(a));

(C) an interstate fisheries commission;

(D) a conservation organization;

(E) a fisheries association;

(F) a State or county government;

(G) an Indian Tribe;

(H) a Native Hawaiian organization;

(I) a Native Hawaiian community;

(J) a Tribal or Indigenous community;

(K) a Federal or State agency with interests in aquaculture; or

(L) any other interested party.

(6) COASTAL STATE.—The term "coastal State" has the meaning given the term "coastal state" in section 304(4) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1453(4)).

(7) CULTURED SPECIES.—The term "cultured species"—

(A) means any species propagated and reared for marine aquaculture;

(B) includes larval marine shellfish species that self-recruit in the offshore environment; and

(C) excludes any member of the class Aves, Reptilia, or Mammalia.

(8) ESCAPE.—The term ''escape'' means the escape of juvenile- or adult-farmed organisms, viable gametes, or fertilized eggs spawned by farmed organisms from offshore aquaculture facilities.

(9) EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Unless otherwise specified by the President in the public interest in a writing published in the Federal Register, the term ''exclusive economic zone'' means a zone, the outer boundary of which—

(i) except as provided by clause (ii), is 200 nautical miles from the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured; or

(ii)(I) if an applicable maritime boundary treaty is in force or is being provisionally applied by the United States, is established by that treaty; or

(II) in the absence of such a treaty and in a case in which the distance between the United States and another country is less than 400 nautical miles, is a line equidistant between the United States and the other country.

(B) INNER BOUNDARY.—Without affecting any Presidential proclamation with regard to the establishment of the United States territorial sea or exclusive economic zone, the inner boundary of the exclusive economic zone is—

(i) in the case of the coastal States, a line coterminous with the seaward boundary of each such State, as described in section 4 of the Submerged Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1312);

(ii) in the case of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a line 9 nautical miles from the coastline of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico;

(iii) in the case of American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, or Guam, a line 3 geographic miles from the coastlines of American Samoa, the United

States Virgin Islands, or Guam, respectively; or

(iv) in the case of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands—

(I) the coastline of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, until the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is granted authority by the United States to regulate all fishing to a line seaward of its coastline; and

(II) upon the United States grant of such authority, the line established by such grant of authority.

(C) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this paragraph may be construed to diminish the authority of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Interior, or any other Federal agency.

(10) FISHERY STAKEHOLDERS.—The term ''fishery stakeholders'' means—

(A) subsistence fishery participants and their dependents;

(B) fishing vessel crews;

(C) fish processor and distribution workers;

(D) recreational fisheries;

(E) Tribal fisheries; and

(F) territorial fishing communities, including such communities in American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.

(11) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term ‘‘Indian Tribe’’ has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

(12) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The term ‘‘institution of higher education’’ has the meaning given that term in section 201 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

(13) NATIVE HAWAIIAN COMMUNITY.—The term ‘‘Native Hawaiian community’’ means the distinct Native Hawaiian indigenous political community that Congress, exercising its plenary power over Native American affairs, has recognized and with which Congress has implemented a special political and trust relationship.

(14) NATIVE HAWAIIAN ORGANIZATION.—The term ''Native Hawaiian organization'' has the meaning given that term in section 6207 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7517) and includes the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

(15) NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM.—The term ''national sea grant college program'' means the program maintained under section 204(a) of the National Sea Grant College Program Act (33 U.S.C. 1123(a)).

(16) OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE.—The term ''offshore aquaculture'' means aquaculture conducted in the exclusive economic zone.

(17) OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE FACILITY.—The term ''offshore aquaculture facility'' means—

(A) an installation or structure used, in whole or in part, for offshore aquaculture; or

(B) an area of the seabed, water column, or the sediment used for offshore aquaculture.

(18) STATE.—The term ''State'' means each of the several States, the District of Columbia, and each commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States.

(19) TRIBAL FISHERY.—The term ''Tribal fishery'' means a fishery that is—

(A) owned, operated, or managed by a Tribal or Indigenous community; or

(B) located in an area—

(i) that is subject to the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe; and

(ii) for which the Indian Tribe has sovereign authority over fishing activity in the area.

(20) TRIBAL LAND.—The term ''Tribal land'' means land that is subject to the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe.

(21) TRIBAL OR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY.—The term ''Tribal or Indigenous community'' means a population of people who are—

(A) enrolled members of an Indian Tribe;

(B) members of an Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian community or organization; or

(C) members of any other community of Indigenous people located in a State.

TITLE I—OFFICE OF AQUACULTURE

SEC. 101. OFFICE OF AQUACULTURE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established within the headquarters of the National Marine Fisheries Service of the Administration the Office of Aquaculture (in this section referred to as the "Office").

(b) RESOURCES.—The Administrator shall ensure the Office is provided with sufficient resources to carry out the duties of the Office under subsection (d).

(c) REPRESENTATION AT REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall provide for representation of the Office in each of the regional fisheries offices of the Administration.

(2) MINIMUM PRESENCE.—In carrying out paragraph (1), the Administrator—

(A) shall provide for the placement of at least one regional aquaculture coordinator from the Office in each regional fisheries office;

(B) shall otherwise ensure that the representation of the Office at a regional fisheries office is, at a minimum, sufficient to permit the Office to fulfill the duties of the Office under subsection (d); and

(C) may increase that representation to the extent warranted by the activity and interest of aquaculture stakeholders in the region.

(d) DUTIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Office shall—

(A) coordinate the implementation of this Act, including administration of—

(i) the aquaculture research program established under subsection (e);

(ii) the offshore aquaculture assessment program established under section 201; and

(iii) the issuance of permits under section 202;

(B) coordinate regulatory, scientific, outreach, and international issues related to aquaculture within the Administration;

(C) collaborate with and leverage existing efforts by the national sea grant college program—

(i) to conduct outreach, education, extension services, and training efforts for aquaculture and offshore aquaculture; and

(ii) to engage with aquaculture stakeholders and, from time to time, convene conferences for aquaculture stakeholders to exchange information and ideas;

(D) maintain aquaculture capacity in the regions covered by the regional fisheries offices of the Administration; and

(E) develop recommendations for performance standards for offshore aquaculture operations that, at a minimum—

(i) encourage development of offshore aquaculture in a manner that complies with environmental law;

(ii) are based on the best scientific information available;

(iii) take into account traditional knowledge of Tribal and Indigenous communities as appropriate to the region;

(iv) are adaptive to offshore aquaculture developments, such as updates in technology and changes in environmental conditions; and

(v) prefer species that are native or historically naturalized to the region; and

(F) prioritize the health of cultured species.

(2) AGREEMENTS WITH STATES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Upon request of the Governor of a coastal State, the Office shall enter into an agreement with the State to allow the State, and aquaculture stakeholders in the State as appropriate, to participate in the activities authorized under sections 201 and 203 and titles III and IV, as though—

(i) the aquaculture conducted in the State's coastal waters were offshore aquaculture; and

(ii) facilities for aquaculture in the State's coastal waters were offshore aquaculture facilities.

(B) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this paragraph or in any agreement entered into under this paragraph shall be construed to affect the authority of the Administrator to issue permits for or regulate aquaculture in State waters, except as expressly provided in such an agreement.

(e) AQUACULTURE RESEARCH PROGRAM AND DUTIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall establish, and provide resources (in addition to the resources required under subsection (b)) for, an aqua-

culture research program that draws upon the scientific capacity of programs of the Administration, such as the Fisheries Science Centers, the national sea grant college program, and the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, to support the efforts of the Office to implement this Act.

(2) FUNCTIONS.—As part of the aquaculture research program established under paragraph (1), the Office shall—

(A) ensure that commercial-scale offshore aquaculture demonstration projects for which permits are issued under section 202 are scientifically monitored to support the implementation of this Act;

(B) evaluate data;

(C) conduct additional research to support the development of sustainable offshore aquaculture;

(D) administer support for industry under section 301;

(E) administer the Aquaculture Centers of Excellence under section 302;

(F) administer the contract to conduct the study described in section 401; and

(G) coordinate the engagement of the Administration with the Comptroller General of the United States as the Comptroller General prepares the report required by section 402.

(f) BUDGET REQUEST.—The Administrator shall include, in the budget justification materials submitted to Congress in support of the budget of the President for a fiscal year pursuant to section 1105 of title 31, United States Code, a request for funding for the Office as a separate line item with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

TITLE II—COMMERCIAL-SCALE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

SEC. 201. ASSESSMENT PROGRAM FOR OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall establish an assessment program (in this section referred to as the ''assessment program'') with the objective of assessing the viability of offshore aquaculture—

(1) in light of changing circumstances and advances in technology; and

(2) using the best available science, information from aquaculture stakeholders, and information de-

veloped from demonstration projects for which permits are issued under section 202.

(b) ELEMENTS.—At a minimum, the assessment program shall examine the following in order to determine the viability of offshore aquaculture:

(1) The ability of different commercial-scale facility designs and operational methods—

(A) to survive various atmospheric and ocean conditions to the extent possible, including high wind speeds or high-energy ocean conditions associated with severe weather, or tidal or tsunami activity, without—

(i) escapes;

(ii) loss of or damage to infrastructure; or

(iii) wildlife entanglement resulting from loss or damaged infrastructure;

(B) to prevent adverse wildlife impacts to the extent possible, including entanglements of large whales, sea turtles, and other species protected under—

(i) the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.); and

(ii) the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.);

(C) to prevent adverse impacts on the marine environment to the extent possible, including impacts to habitat, water chemistry, and wildlife; and

(D) to prevent adverse impacts on navigation and safety, to the extent possible, to existing ocean users due to offshore aquaculture facilities, including requirements for operations, navigation, and transit associated with such facilities.

(2) The ability of different technologies to provide reliable and timely data on offshore aquaculture facilities, including visual data and other relevant data types, on a regular basis to enable the Administrator to monitor—

(A) the compliance of demonstration projects for which permits are issued under section 202 with the requirements under subsection (b) of such section;

(B) impacts on the marine environment; and

(C) interference with existing uses of the water bodies in which demonstration projects for which permits are issued under section 202 are located.

(3) The relative risks, benefits, and costs of various types of offshore aquaculture, including different species of finfish in different geographies and under varying climactic and ecological conditions.

(c) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 2 years after the date on which the Administrator establishes the assessment program, the Administrator shall publish, make available to the public, and submit to the National Academy of Sciences and the Comptroller General of the United States, a report that includes the following:

(1) A description of each demonstration project for which a permit is issued under section 202, including documentation supporting the issuance of the permit.

(2) A summary of the information submitted to the Administrator for each such demonstration project.

(3) A description of the progress made toward meeting the objective described in subsection (a).

SEC. 202. PERMITS FOR DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS FOR OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE FACILITIES.

(a) ISSUANCE OF PERMITS.—After the Administrator establishes the assessment program under section 201, the Administrator shall issue permits for demonstration projects for proposed offshore aquaculture facilities in furtherance of the assessment program.

(b) ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.—To be eligible for the issuance of a permit under subsection (a), a demonstration project is required to—

(1) advance the objective described in section 201(a);

(2) cultivate only native or historically naturalized species that pose a minimal threat of harm to wildlife and the ecosystem in which the project is located;

(3) incorporate design and operational practices that minimize the risk of escape, wildlife entanglement, and adverse pollution impacts;

(4) develop an escape response and infrastructure loss or damage plan that minimizes the impact of any escapes or infrastructure loss or damage on the marine environment and on other uses of the water body in which the project is located;

(5) comply with all applicable requirements of—

(A) the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) (commonly referred to as the ''Clean Water Act'');

(B) the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.);

(C) the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.); and

(D) the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.);

(6) maximize compatibility with, and prevent or minimize displacement of, existing uses and users of the marine environment in the near vicinity of where the project is located;

(7) conform to best practices to avoid or minimize the use of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals and minimize the release of such pharmaceuticals into the environment; and

(8) be designed and managed in partnership with—

(A) a land-grant college or university (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103));

(B) a historically black college or university (as defined by the term "part B institution" in section 322 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1061));

(C) a 1994 Institution (as defined in section 532 of the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (Public Law 103–382; 7 U.S.C. 301 note)); or

(D) a sea grant college (as defined in section 203 of the National Sea Grant College Program Act (33 U.S.C. 1122)).

(c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—A person that holds a permit for a demonstration project issued under subsection (a) may conduct offshore aquaculture consistent with—

(1) this Act, including regulations prescribed to carry out this Act; and

(2) other applicable provisions of law, including regulations.

(d) APPLICATIONS.—A person seeking a permit for a demonstration project shall submit to the Administrator an application that specifies—

(1) the proposed location of the offshore aquaculture facility and the location of on-shore facilities used for propagation or rearing of cultured species, such as hatcheries or research operations;

(2) the type of aquaculture operations that will be conducted at all facilities described in paragraph (1);

(3) the cultured species, or a specified range of species, to be propagated or reared, or both, at the offshore aquaculture facility;

(4)(A) the source of eggs, larvae, or juvenile cultured species that will be used in offshore aquaculture operations;

(B) an analysis of the likely ecosystem impacts of such operations, such as the spread of pathogens; and

(C) the information upon which the analysis was based;

(5) plans to respond to—

(A) a natural disaster;

(B) an escape;

(C) disease;

(D) loss or damage to infrastructure; and

(E) other circumstances designated by the Administrator; and

(6) such other design, construction, and operational information as the Administrator may require to ensure the integrity of the operations and contingency planning.

(e) NOTICE, PUBLIC COMMENT, AND OBJECTIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall—

(A) not later than 90 days after receiving an application under this section, publish in the Federal Register a notice summarizing the application; and

(B) invite and consider public comments, and formal objections from any Governor or Tribal leader of a specially affected coastal jurisdiction, on applications for permits under this section.

(2) SPECIALLY AFFECTED COASTAL JURISDICTION.—In this subsection, the term ''specially affected coastal jurisdiction'' means any coastal State or Indian Tribe—

(A) the land, Tribal land, or waters of which—

(i) are adjacent to the Federal waters in which the project will be conducted; and

(ii) are used, or are scheduled to be used, as a support base for the project; and

(B) for which there is a reasonable probability of significant effect on uses of land, Tribal land, or water from the project.

(f) PRIORITY CONSIDERATION.—In considering applications for permits for demonstration projects under this section, the Administrator shall give priority consideration to applications for demonstration projects—

(1) owned or operated by applicants who can demonstrate that the demonstration project will directly benefit individuals who are already participating in the agricultural, wild-caught fishery, or aquaculture industries who have been negatively impacted by the COVID–19 pandemic, natural disasters, or major disasters declared under section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170); or

(2) sited within an Aquaculture Opportunity Area identified by the Secretary of Commerce in accordance with section 7 of Executive Order 13921 (16 U.S.C. 1801 note; relating to promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth).

(g) SOCIOECONOMIC DATA.—In considering applications for permits for demonstration projects under this section, and to support the study described in section 401, the report required by section 402, and the assessment program established under section 201, the Administrator shall collect socioeconomic data associated with the owner or operator of, and communities employed or otherwise affected by, each demonstration project.

(h) DECISIONS WITH RESPECT TO ISSUANCE, DEFERRAL, OR DENIAL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the conclusion of the period for public comments under subsection (e) with respect to an application for a permit for a demonstration project under this section, the Administrator shall—

(A) issue the permit, if the Administrator determines the application complies with the requirements of this Act, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), and other applicable law;

(B) if the Administrator determines that the application does not comply with the requirements described in subparagraph (A) and can be modified to comply with those requirements—

(i) defer the decision on the permit; and

(ii) provide to the applicant a notice that specifies modifications to the proposed demonstration project needed for a permit to be issued; or

(C) if the Administrator determines that the application does not comply with the requirements described in subparagraph (A) and that the application cannot be modified to comply with such requirements, deny the permit and provide a justification for the denial.

(2) OTHER APPROVAL.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—An application for a permit for a demonstration project under this section shall be considered approved, as if a permit for the application had been issued under paragraph (1)(A), if—

(i) the Administrator does not take action under subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of paragraph (1) within 90 days after the conclusion of the period for public comments under subsection (e) with respect to the application;

(ii) no formal objection to the application has been received from the Governor or Tribal leader of a specially affected coastal jurisdiction (as defined in subsection (e)); and

(iii) the Administrator has determined that the application complies with the requirements described in paragraph (1)(A).

(B) PROCESS.—The Administrator shall establish a process for the approval of applications under this paragraph.

(i) EFFECTIVE PERIOD.—A permit for a demonstration project issued under this section—

(1) shall be in effect during the 10-year period beginning on the date on which the project begins in-water operations; and

(2) may be renewed as provided by subsection (k).

(j) RENEWAL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator may renew a permit, that has not been revoked, for a demonstration project issued under this section for an additional 10-year period after the 10-year period described in subsection (i)(1) if—

(A) the owner or operator of the project submits to the Administrator a proposal for renewal of the permit by a date determined by the Administrator; and

(B) the Administrator determines that the permit, as modified by the proposal, remains in compliance with the requirements described in subsection (j)(1).

(2) NOTICE AND PUBLIC COMMENT.—The Administrator shall—

(A) publish in the Federal Register a notice summarizing each proposal received under paragraph (1) with respect to the renewal of a permit;

(B) invite public comments for a period of not less than 60 days regarding each such proposal; and

(C) consider such comments in determining whether to approve the renewal of the permit.

(k) AUTHORITY TO MODIFY OR TERMINATE PARTICIPATION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS AND ORDER REMOVAL OF FACILITIES.—The Administrator may require modifications to a demonstration project for which a permit is issued under this section, terminate such a permit, or order the removal of an offshore aquaculture facility authorized to operate under such a permit, if—

(1)(A) the project incurs an incident involving a death or serious personal injury and the Administrator determines that negligence of the project operator was the cause of or a contributing factor to the incident;

(B) operation of the project results in a violation of—

(i) the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.); or

(ii) the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.);

(C) the owner or operator of the project fails to comply with all of the terms and conditions of—

(i) the permit; or

(ii) modifications required by the Administrator under this subsection; or

(D) the Administrator determines that operation of the demonstration project would be unsafe or result in unacceptable negative impacts to—

(i) the marine environment;

(ii) nearby communities; or

(iii) other users of the water body in which the project is located; and

(2) before requiring a modification to the demonstration project, terminating the permit, or ordering the removal of the offshore aquaculture facility—

(A) the Administrator provides a warning notice to the owner or operator of the project; and

(B) the owner or operator is given an opportunity to address the Administrator's concerns.

(l) COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT REVIEW.—The submission of an application for a permit for a demonstration project under this section shall trigger the right of review by a coastal State under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1451 et seq.).

SEC. 203. COORDINATION OF PERMIT REVIEWS FOR DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administration shall serve as the lead Federal agency for purposes of providing information on Federal permitting requirements for demonstration projects under section 202.

(b) INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall convene representatives of the agencies described in paragraph (2) to provide prospective applicants for permits for demonstration projects under section 202 an opportunity for informal consultation with such agencies.

(2) AGENCIES DESCRIBED.—The agencies described in this paragraph are the following:

(A) The Department of Agriculture.

(B) The Environmental Protection Agency.

(C) The Army Corps of Engineers.

(D) The Department in which the Coast Guard is operating.

(E) The Department of Defense.

(F) Any other agency the Administrator considers appropriate.

(3) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this subsection shall preclude an applicant or a prospective applicant from contacting Federal agencies directly.

(c) ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS.—To the extent allowable under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), any environmental analysis or environmental impact statement required under that Act for offshore aquaculture activities proposed to be carried out under a demonstration project under section 202 shall be conducted through a single, consolidated environmental review and the Administration, through the Office of Aquaculture established by section 101, shall serve as the lead Federal agency.

(d) COORDINATION OF PERMIT REVIEWS.—To the extent practicable under this Act and all other applicable laws, including regulations, Federal agencies with permitting requirements applicable to offshore aquaculture activities proposed to be carried out under a demonstration project under section 202 shall coordinate their review processes in order to provide a timely response to an applicant not later than 180 days after the submission of the application.

SEC. 204. REPORTING BY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date on which a demonstration project for which a permit is issued under section 202 commences, and annually thereafter until the demonstration project terminates, the owner or operator of the demonstration project shall submit to the Administrator the following:

(1) Production data.

(2) Information on interactions with wild species, mitigation measures taken, and the results of such interactions and measures.

(3) Information on technology and operational practices used to measure and monitor—

(A) effluent;

(B) integrity of cage materials and other gear; and

(C) health of the cultivated species.

(4) Information on environmental and ecosystem impacts.

(5) Data necessary for the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to complete the study described in section 401.

(6) Owner, operator, and employee demographic data and other relevant data as determined appropriate by the Administrator for purposes of assessing—

(A) the direct benefits of the demonstration project to fishery stakeholders; and

(B) the economic and social benefits of the demonstration project for nearby coastal communities.

(7) Information on navigation and safety impacts to existing ocean users.

(8) Such additional information as the Administrator requires to fulfill the goals and objective of the assessment program established under section 201.

(b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Administrator shall, upon request, provide technical assistance to owners and operators of demonstration projects for which permits are issued under section 202 to comply with the reporting requirements of this section.

(c) EMERGENCY REPORTING.—The Administrator shall establish an emergency reporting process for each owner or operator of a demonstration project for which a permit is issued under section 202 to immediately report suspected or known interactions between project facilities or vessels and protected wild species.

SEC. 205. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION; SAVINGS PROVISIONS.

(a) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Any requirement in this title to identify or consider an impact or effect on human health or the environment shall be construed as including a requirement to make such identification or consideration while taking into account—

(1) the cumulative impact of such impact or effect in the context of all sources of emissions, discharges, or releases from any source, past, present, or in the reasonably foreseeable future, on the affected environment and population;

(2) any characteristics of such environment and population that may heighten vulnerability to environmental pollution and related health risks; and

(3) any action or practice that, even if appearing neutral, has the effect of subjecting individuals to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

(b) STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION.—A permit for a demonstration project issued under section 202 shall not supersede or substitute for any other authorization required under Federal or State law.

(c) APPLICABILITY.—This title does not apply with respect to applications for a permit in process on the date of the enactment of this Act or permits that are in effect on that date.

TITLE III—WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, FINANCING, AND OTHER SUPPORT

SEC. 301. GENERAL SUPPORT FOR INDUSTRY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall support the development of offshore aquaculture consistent with this Act and other applicable Federal law.

(b) MARKETING AND PROMOTION GRANTS.—The Administrator, in consultation with private sector aquaculture stakeholders, shall establish and administer a grant program to support the sale and public perception of cultured species domestically and internationally.

(c) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator, in consultation with private sector operators of offshore aquaculture facilities, academic institutions, and the national sea grant college program, shall establish

and administer a grant program to support the education and training of individuals with the skills needed to manage and operate offshore aquaculture facilities.

(2) AQUACULTURE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE.—The Administrator may carry out paragraph (1) through the program established under section 302(b)(1).

(d) REGIONAL NETWORKS.—The Administrator, through each regional fisheries office of the Administration, shall organize a network of—

(1) regional experts and Federal agency contacts, in coordination with relevant organizations, including the national sea grant college program, the Regional Aquaculture Centers of the Department of Agriculture, institutions of higher education, and the Cooperative Extension System of the Department of Agriculture, to provide technical expertise and extension services for offshore aquaculture and information on Federal permit requirements for offshore aquaculture; and

(2) individuals and businesses interested in aquaculture operations and products to facilitate professional development, marketing, mentoring op-

portunities, and agency outreach and education on aquaculture.

(e) AQUACULTURE DATABASE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall establish and maintain an aquaculture database within the Office of Aquaculture established by section 101.

(2) INCLUSIONS.—The database required by paragraph (1) shall include information on research, technologies, monitoring techniques, best practices, and advisory board recommendations relating to aquaculture and offshore aquaculture.

(3) SAFEGUARDING OF INFORMATION.—The Administrator shall make the database required by paragraph (1) available in a manner that safeguards personally identifiable information and confidential business information.

(4) PATENTS.—The inclusion of information in the database required by paragraph (1) shall not be considered to be publication for purposes of subsection (a) or (b) of section 102 of title 35, United States Code.

(f) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR OPERATORS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator, through the Office of Aquaculture established by section 101

and the regional aquaculture coordinators described in such section, shall organize a program in each regional fisheries office of the Administration to provide technical assistance to operators of offshore aquaculture facilities.

(2) TAILORING.—The programs required by paragraph (1) shall be tailored to meet the unique needs of each region.

(3) CONSULTATIONS.—Under each program required by paragraph (1), the regional aquaculture coordinators described in section 101 may conduct consultations with the operator of each offshore aquaculture facility in the region concerned on a regular basis—

(A) to assess the status of the operator's business; and

(B) if appropriate, to identify available resources to support the operator, such as regional experts, university extension agents, and grant opportunities.

(g) CAPITAL MARKETS.—

(1) PROVISION OF INFORMATION.—In order to enhance access to capital markets, the Administrator shall provide financial institutions and investment firms with objective, science-based information on

offshore aquaculture and the Federal regulatory regime for offshore aquaculture.

(2) ECONOMIC ANALYSIS.—The Administrator shall provide economic analysis to answer queries regarding the value of offshore aquaculture assets to secure financing, such as equipment, governmental permits, inventory, and intellectual property.

(3) COLLABORATION.—In order to achieve the goals of this subsection, the Administrator is encouraged to collaborate with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the regional networks established under subsection (d).

SEC. 302. AQUACULTURE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) COVERED INSTITUTION.—The term ''covered institution'' means—

(A) a minority-serving institution;

(B) a Native Hawaiian-serving institution;

(C) an Alaska Native-serving institution;

(D) a historically Black college or university; or

(E) a Tribal college or university.

(2) HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY.—The term ''historically Black college or university'' has the meaning given the term ''part B

institution'' in section 322 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1061).

(3) MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTION.—The term ''minority-serving institution'' means an eligible institution described in paragraph (2), (4), (5), (6), or (7) of section 371(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067q(a)).

(4) TRIBAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY.—The term ''Tribal college or university'' means a Tribal College or University (as defined in section 316(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c(b)) that is chartered by the governing body of the applicable Indian Tribe or by the Federal Government.

(b) AQUACULTURE CURRICULUM GRANTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator, in consultation with private sector aquaculture stakeholders, academic institutions, and the national sea grant college program, shall establish a program to award grants to covered institutions to assist in establishing or enhancing an aquaculture curriculum for undergraduate, graduate, or certificate courses of study at such covered institutions.

(2) AQUACULTURE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE.—A covered institution that receives a grant under this section shall be known as an ''Aquaculture Center of Excellence''.

(3) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, a covered institution shall submit to the Administrator an application that includes any plans to partner with one or more other institutions of higher education as authorized under paragraph (5).

(4) USE OF GRANT AMOUNTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A covered institution receiving a grant under this section shall use the grant amounts to establish or enhance an aquaculture curriculum for undergraduate, graduate, or certificate courses of study that may include the following:

(i) Training in various skills needed by successful aquaculture entrepreneurs, including—

(I) offshore aquaculture operations;

(II) business management, strategic planning, business plan development, capital financing and fundraising, financial management and accounting, market analysis and competitive analysis, and market entry and strategy execution; and

(III) any other skill specific to the needs of the student population and the surrounding community, including with respect to social and environmental sustainability, as determined by the covered institution.

(ii) Natural and social science research programs in aquaculture and natural fisheries, including offshore aquaculture.

(iii) Development of extension programs (or cooperation with existing extension programs) that—

(I) educate and engage community members, including elementary and secondary school students, on aquaculture and aquaculture career pathways; and

(II) transfer newly developed techniques and research information developed or collated at the covered institution to aquaculture stakeholders.

(iv) Career development, such as the establishment of cooperatives, apprenticeships, internships, practicums, mentorships, accelerators, or grant competitions.

(B) LIMITATIONS ON USE OF GRANT AMOUNTS.—Amounts from a grant awarded under this section may be used only for expenses directly related to the implementation of the curriculum or activities authorized under this section.

(5) PARTNERSHIPS.—In applying for grants and carrying out activities with grant amounts under this section, a covered institution may partner with one or more other institutions of higher education with established aquaculture programs, including institutions of higher education not otherwise eligible for grants under this section, to facilitate the sharing of resources and knowledge necessary for the development or enhancement of aquaculture curriculum at the covered institution.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section

$25,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2030, to remain available until expended.

SEC. 303. WORKING WATERFRONTS PRESERVATION GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development (referred to in this section as the ‘‘Secretary’’), shall award grants, on a competitive basis, that support the commercial fishing industry, the aquaculture industry, the for-hire recreational fishing industry, or the boatbuilding industry in coastal States.

(b) APPLICATION.—An entity desiring a grant under this section shall submit to the Secretary an application containing such information as the Secretary may reasonably require.

(c) CONSIDERATIONS.—In selecting entities to receive a grant under this section, the Secretary shall give substantial weight to—

(1) the economic significance of a project to the commercial fishing industry, the aquaculture industry, the for-hire recreational fishing industry, or the boatbuilding industry in the immediate vicinity and in the coastal State in which the project is located;

(2) the availability of waterfront access points for the commercial fishing industry, the aquaculture

industry, the for-hire recreational fishing industry, or the boatbuilding industry within the community in which the entity seeks to carry out the project;

(3) the utility of the project for use in the commercial fishing industry, the aquaculture industry, the for-hire recreational fishing industry, or the boatbuilding industry with respect to the natural characteristics and developed infrastructure of the community in which the project will be located;

(4) whether the entity has a business plan for the project;

(5) anticipated or likely impacts of the project on existing uses, including commercial fishing, aquaculture, offshore aquaculture, for-hire recreational fishing, or boatbuilding;

(6) the ability of the entity to demonstrate a need, or support, for the project within that community; and

(7) if the project will confer property protection benefits, and the duration of those benefits.

(d) COST-SHARING.—A grant under this section for a project may not exceed 50 percent of the total cost of the project.

(e) IMPROVED OR PROTECTED PROPERTY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—A grant under this section may be used to improve or protect privately-owned real property or interests in privately-owned real property, including easements, only from willing owners.

(2) NO EXERCISE OF EMINENT DOMAIN.—No Federal, State, or local agency may exercise the power of eminent domain to secure title to any real property or facilities in connection with a project carried out with a grant under this section.

(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section $20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2026 through 2030.

SEC. 304. OUTREACH ON SUSTAINABLE OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall conduct outreach on sustainable offshore aquaculture to promote understanding, science-based decision making, and commercial adoption.

(b) ENGAGEMENT.—In carrying out subsection (a), the Administrator shall use appropriate means to engage—

(1) the general public;

(2) community leaders;

(3) governmental officials;

(4) the business community;

(5) the academic community; and

(6) the nonprofit sector.

TITLE IV—STUDIES AND REPORTS

SEC. 401. STUDY ON OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE BY OCEAN STUDIES BOARD OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall seek to enter into a contract with the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (in this section referred to as the ''Board'') under which the Board shall, not later than 5 years after the date on which the Administrator establishes the assessment program under section 201—

(1) complete a study to develop the scientific basis for efficient and effective regulation of offshore aquaculture; and

(2) submit to Congress and make publicly available the results of the study.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The study completed pursuant to subsection (a) shall, with respect to offshore aquaculture—

(1) identify—

(A) optimal methods of operation of offshore aquaculture facilities to limit adverse effects on the environment, wildlife, and human well-being, including—

(i) considerations to guide siting decisions of such facilities;

(ii) appropriate stocking densities; and

(iii) opportunities for selective breeding;

(B) a science-based definition of "responsible offshore aquaculture feed or other inputs", including guidance on sourcing feed or other inputs to address long- or short-term concerns, including the availability and scalability of such inputs;

(C) potential adverse effects on the environment, wildlife, and human well-being, including from—

(i) the use of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals by offshore aquaculture facilities, including through analyses necessary to establish acceptable rates, impact levels, and risk thresholds, such as analyses of organism antibiotic consumption or metabolization versus excretion to the surrounding environment;

(ii) assimilation of pollution originating from offshore aquaculture facilities on marine organisms;

(iii) abandoned, lost, damaged or otherwise discarded equipment;

(iv) harmful interactions with wildlife;

(v) interbreeding between cultured species and native marine species;

(vi) the spread of disease from cultured species to wild species;

(vii) the collection and removal of brood stock for offshore aquaculture operations, and hatcheries and prestocking rearing operations that are specific to offshore aquaculture;

(viii) large-scale cultivation of filter-feed bivalve organisms and seaweed;

(ix) offshore aquaculture facilities acting as aggregating devices and increasing the vulnerability of wild fisheries and wildlife populations to fishing or other sources of mortality;

(x) predator control devices and methods; and

(xi) the use of non-sustainable sources of feed or other inputs, including the use of globally limited marine resources for feed ingredients, and scalability of alternatives, including—

(I) novel ingredients (for example, insect, single cell protein, and algae);

(II) traditional ingredients (for example, soya); and

(III) other inputs;

(D) potential methods and technologies to mitigate adverse effects, including the effects identified under subparagraph (C);

(E) potential conflicts between offshore aquaculture facilities and other users of the offshore environment, and solutions to mitigate such conflicts;

(F) the types of data and qualitative information necessary for the optimal operation of offshore aquaculture facilities and appropriate methods of procuring such data and information, including from—

(i) citizen science (as defined in section 402(c) of the Crowdsourcing and Citizen Science Act (15 U.S.C. 3724(c))); and

(ii) the traditional knowledge of Tribal and Indigenous communities; and

(G) best practices for offshore aquaculture siting and operations to manage and plan for predicted changes in global atmospheric and oceanographic conditions; and

(2) provide recommendations for legislative or administrative action with respect to—

(A) methods of operation identified under paragraph (1)(A);

(B) mitigating adverse effects identified under paragraph (1)(C);

(C) environmental standards, control rules, or reference points that build on the existing public and private standards for the sustainability of offshore aquaculture; and

(D) ensuring that operators of offshore aquaculture facilities adhere to international standards for social responsibility, public health, and equitable labor practices, including with respect to sourcing inputs for such facilities.

SEC. 402. REPORT ON OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE BY GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 5 years after the date on which the Administrator establishes the assessment program under section 201, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report examining the permitting, monitoring, and regulation of offshore aquaculture during the 15-year period ending on such date of establishment.

(b) BASES OF REPORT.—The Comptroller General shall base the report required by subsection (a) on available literature, case studies, and aquaculture stakeholder input.

(c) ELEMENTS OF REPORT.—The report required by subsection (a) shall—

(1) assess the feasibility and potential positive and negative implications of designating a lead agency to issue permits for offshore aquaculture operations in a timely manner;

(2) identify lessons learned during the period described in subsection (a) with respect to—

(A) the effect of offshore aquaculture type, location, and regulatory framework on the success of offshore aquaculture projects;

(B) the degree of involvement of coastal or adjacent States or Tribal or Indigenous communities in consultations for, planning for, or operations of offshore aquaculture;

(C) safety protocols and risk mitigation measures for the permitting and oversight processes for offshore aquaculture, including—

(i) escape prevention measures;

(ii) emergency event response planning;

(iii) compliance monitoring, particularly in remote locations;

(iv) compliance with Federal laws;

(v) mechanisms for reporting to appropriate Federal authorities; and

(vi) vessel navigation aids to ensure navigational safety;

(D) the effect of incentives to reduce adverse effects or disparate impacts from offshore aquaculture operations;

(E) building and optimizing synergies between offshore aquaculture and wild-caught fishing activities, or offshore, nearshore, and onshore aquaculture activities, including market development, increasing seafood consumption, and shared infrastructure;

(F) the environmental effects of offshore aquaculture operations, including mechanisms to prevent harm to the environment, wildlife, or human well-being;

(G) the net economic and social benefits of offshore aquaculture projects, particularly for nearby communities and fishery stakeholders, based on project size, regulatory structures, and financing structures;

(H) the impact of introducing offshore aquaculture products to the marketplace on supply and demand for wild-capture fisheries products, and methods for ensuring resiliency and growth for both offshore aquaculture and wild-capture fisheries products;

(I) mechanisms to enhance capital investment, workforce development, and equitable opportunity requirements or assistance programs in the permitting process for offshore aquaculture, or to diversify permit applicants;

(J) outstanding needs for continued research, development, education activities, programs, and funding regarding—

(i) offshore aquaculture projects; and

(ii) development of the domestic workforce and entrepreneurship related to offshore aquaculture;

(K) the economic potential for both large- and small-scale offshore aquaculture operations to generate a positive return on investment under various regulatory and financing structures;

(L) the applicability and sufficiency of existing regulatory systems for offshore aquaculture; and

(M) existing local, State, Federal, and foreign regulatory standards that may serve as models for efficient and effective regulation of offshore aquaculture; and

(3) include such recommendations as the Comptroller General may have with respect to future offshore aquaculture operations, including with respect to—

(A) regulatory processes necessary for permitting, monitoring, and oversight, including processes and techniques related to siting, deployment, operations, and decommissioning;

(B) potential safeguards, data collection, or monitoring required to minimize disparate impacts on specially affected coastal jurisdictions (as defined in section 202(e)), fishery stakeholders, local economies, marine environments, and existing domestic economic sectors;

(C) mechanisms for optimizing coordination among Federal agencies with a role in permitting or supporting offshore aquaculture without compromising the goals of such permitting;

(D) methods for effectively involving aquaculture stakeholders, including—

(i) specially affected coastal jurisdictions (as defined in section 202(e));

(ii) local communities;

(iii) regional offshore waters users and management groups, including regional fishery management councils; and

(iv) users of local, State, Tribal, and Federal waters and coastal resources;

(E) best practices for incorporating local knowledge, including from Tribal or Indigenous communities;

(F) capabilities of Federal agencies that are necessary for effective regulation of the offshore aquaculture sector; and

(G) how creating private rights of action or waiving sovereign immunity would affect the development of offshore aquaculture projects and the acceptance of such projects by nearshore and offshore waters user groups and coastal communities.