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REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES
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Date: 12/22/20

To: The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Re: NOAA Aquaculture Opportunity Areas-Request for Information-NOAA-NMFS-2020-0118

Dear Secretary Ross,

I strongly urge that you consider Alaska for future designation as an Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) in state and appropriate federal waters. Specifically, I recommend an Alaskan AOA focused on the cultivation of shellfish and seaweeds.

As Chair of the House Special Committee on Fisheries the past 6 years, I have seen the mariculture industry grow statewide. As the representative of Kodiak, Cordova, and much of Kachemak Bay, I have witnessed oyster and kelp farmers build an industry in my district.

Alaska's first kelp farm permits were issued in my hometown of Kodiak in 2016. Since that time, the industry has spread across Alaska, showing massive potential. Trident Seafoods, the nation's largest seafood processor, is interested in large-scale kelp farming operations in Alaska. In addition, I am very excited about emerging science regarding the benefits of kelp in combating ocean acidification.

It is important to note that finfish farming in Alaska is prohibited by law (A.S. 16.40.210) and is much maligned by the vast majority of Alaskans. We treasure our wild salmon, and my request is specific to the currently cultivated species, primarily pacific oysters, as well as sugar, ribbon, and bull kelp.

Alaska has vast waters suitable for commercial aquaculture, as well as a state management agency that is supportive of an AOA designation. Moreover, the aquaculture industry here is environmentally defensible, and promotes the economic and social sustainability of our coastal communities.

In closing, I urge your favorable consideration of Alaska for future designation as an AOA in state and appropriate federal waters for the cultivation of shellfish and seaweeds.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Louise Stutes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Representative Louise Stutes
Chair, House Special Committee on Fisheries
Alaska State Legislature