

VALDEZ FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.  
SOLOMON GULCH HATCHERY

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December 21, 2020

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

**Re: NOAA Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, Request for Information – Alaska Letter of Support**

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Valdez Fisheries Development Association Inc., (VFDA) recommends Alaska for your consideration as a potential Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) authorized by the Executive Order titled “Promoting America’s Economic Growth and Competitiveness”. VFDA recommends that only Alaska state waters, for the cultivation of shellfish and seaweeds, be given particular consideration in your determination and future suitability analyses for Alaska.

The VFDA is a private, not for profit aquaculture association with a mission to enhance regional fisheries through hatchery propagation. VFDA has been actively engaged in the development and support of sport, commercial, subsistence, and personal use salmon fisheries in Alaska for 40 years. In addition, VFDA has fostered other fisheries development projects in our community to assist local fishermen, including a regional cold storage facility and fisheries business incubator.

Alaska, with over 30,000 miles of coastline and a pristine marine environment, supports a fledgling, yet already significant mariculture industry. In Alaska, mariculture is defined as the enhancement, restoration, and farming of shellfish and seaweeds. Species include oysters, clams, mussels, geoduck, crab, sea cucumber, and seaweeds (kelp). ***It is important to note that finfish farming in Alaska is prohibited under Alaska Statute 16.40.210 and is thus not included in mariculture activities in Alaska.*** Alaskan’s have also expressed strong support for the prohibition of finfish farming in federal waters off Alaska as well.

VFDA is located within the Prince Williams Sound region, which already supports a new and growing mariculture industry. In 2020, nearly one third of all new applications for aquaculture businesses to farm kelp, oysters, and clams were from Prince William Sound. These new starts contribute to the approximate 1500 acres currently under permit or application for mariculture projects statewide. Over the next decade, Alaska is poised to become a major producer of aquatic farmed species, creating a sustainable source of secure food and improving the lives and economies of coastal Alaskans.

We ask that you give your full consideration to granting Alaska the designation of an Aquaculture Opportunity Area at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Mike H. Wells  
Executive Director