**NWX-DOC CONFERENCING**

**Moderator: ANDREW RICHARD**

**June 9, 2022**

**7:00 am CT**

Coordinator: Welcome, and thank you for standing by. I'd just like to inform all parties that your lines have been placed in a listen-only mode until the comment session of today's conference call. I'd also like to inform you that today's call is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I'd now like to turn the meeting over to Mr. Andrew Richard. Thank you, sir. You may begin.

Andrew Richard: All right. Good evening. Welcome. The meeting will be starting soon. To listen to the meeting and to provide comments, participants must call in by phone. The phone number to join the meeting is 800-857-5095, and the participant passcode is 9612327.

You'll join the call in listen-only mode. You do not need to mute your phone as a phone line will be muted automatically by the operator, and unmuted later if you decide to provide comment. As a reminder, these phone lines are being recorded. Thank you for joining the public scoping meeting. We'll begin soon.

And while you wait, please feel free to scan the QR code in the upper right-hand corner of the screen with your mobile device. You'll be able to access the Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site. All right. I'm seeing that we're slowing down with folks logging on to the call. So, we will get started here.

So, good evening. Thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join the meeting this evening. Tonight, NOAA Fisheries will host the first of three virtual public scoping meetings to solicit public comment that will inform the development of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

The Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement will assess the impacts of identifying one or more aquaculture opportunity areas in federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, and siting offshore aquacultures in these potential AOA locations.

My name is Andrew Richard. I'm the regional aquaculture Coordinator for NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, based in St. Petersburg Florida. I'm also the regional lead for the Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, and will be leading this evening's meeting.

Tonight, I'll start off our meeting by providing a brief presentation with information about the notice of intent to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement that NOAA Fisheries published in the Federal Register on June 1st of 2022. This notice initiated a 60-day public scoping period where NOAA will be soliciting feedback from stakeholders, which these virtual public scoping meetings are a part of.

Following this brief presentation, there will be an opportunity for the public to participate and provide verbal comments that will help to inform the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement NOAA Fisheries intends to develop.

Before we get started, I'd like to remind everyone attending this meeting that the meeting is being recorded, and will be considered part of the administrative record for the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, also known as the PEIS.

If you would like to provide public comments and don't feel comfortable with your comments being recorded, I'll provide instructions on how you can submit comments in writing towards the end of this presentation. Tonight, I will start off my presentation by providing a brief background on the Aquaculture Opportunity Area initiative, and why NOAA Fisheries is undertaking this effort.

Next, I will talk about the notice of intent and preliminary plans for the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, what NOAA Fisheries is proposing, what is the intent of this planning process, what federal agencies are we working with to do this, what areas we're thinking about for identifying aquaculture opportunity areas, and when the public will have an opportunity to provide their input into this process.

After that, I will detail the types of information and comments that would be helpful for NOAA Fisheries and how you can provide those comments. Last and certainly not least, will be an opportunity for participants of this meeting to provide verbal comments, and we'll share more information about how to do so and when at the end of this presentation.

If you are interested in receiving updates about the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement process, please reach out to the email at the bottom of the screen. In May of 2020, under Section 7 of the Executive Order, Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth, Executive Order 13921, the Secretary of Commerce, which oversees NOAA and its Fisheries office, was directed to identify geographic areas suitable for commercial aquaculture development, and directed to complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, to assess the impact of siting aquaculture within those locations.

In August of 2022, NOAA Fisheries was selected - selected the federal waters of Southern California and in the Gulf of Mexico as the first two regions where aquaculture opportunity areas may be identified based on the foundational work of already completed siting analysis and environmental reviews to support AOA development, the maturity of inter-agency communication and collaboration in the regions, industry interest, and a history of engagement with stakeholders on aquaculture in the region.

Since only federal waters are being considered for these first two regions to identify aquaculture opportunity areas, we're specifically referencing offshore locations for the siting of marine aquaculture at federal water start from three to nine miles from shore, depending on the state in the Gulf of Mexico, and extend out to 200 miles to the extent of the US exclusive economic zone.

For some attending this meeting who may not be familiar with the term offshore marina aquaculture, offshore aquaculture is one method of growing marine organisms done so in an open ocean environment. Offshore aquaculture is not exclusive to just growing green finfish, and is also used to grow shellfish and seaweed as well. Pictures are examples of open ocean seaweed and finfish farms.

With the growing human population and globally stable wild capture fishery harvest over the last 20 years, there exists an unmet need for fresh and frozen seafood in the US that results in roughly 70 to 85% of the seafood we consume in the US being imported. Of that amount, approximately 50% of that seafood comes from foreign aquaculture production. Pictured are examples of open water finfish and shellfish farms.

With demand for seafood poised to continue to grow, wild-caught fisheries alone cannot meet the domestic demand for seafood. Shellfish, finfish, and seaweed aquaculture are a steady source of safe nutritious, sustainable seafood for consumers in the United States and worldwide.

Increases in seafood demand, food security considerations, and economic opportunities, highlight the need for increased domestic development of aquaculture, of which offshore aquaculture can play an important role. Pictured is an example of multi-trophic or multi-species aquaculture where finfish, shellfish, and seaweed aquaculture are grown together, and utilize the output of higher trophic organisms for growth.

Earlier, I mentioned the Executive Order promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth, directs NOAA to identify aquaculture opportunity areas. So, what exactly are aquaculture opportunity areas? An aquaculture opportunity area, or AOA, is simply a defined geographic region that has been evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture.

AOAs may be suitable for finfish, shellfish, seaweed, or multi-species aquaculture. NOAA Fisheries, we use a combination of scientific analysis, public engagement, to identify AOAs that may be environmentally, socially, and economically suitable for siting multiple commercial aquaculture operations.

AOAs may only be identified by NOAA Fisheries after the completion of a final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, and issuance of a record of decision, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. So, why is NOAA Fisheries proposing to do a PEIS then?

In the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, NOAA Fisheries is proposing to identify one or more AOAs in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. To do so, NOAA Fisheries will evaluate the impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of siting aquaculture potential AOA locations.

One major distinction or difference between this effort and other aquaculture efforts ongoing in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, is that identifying aquaculture opportunity areas is purely a planning process intended to perform future aquaculture development.

Identifying aquaculture opportunity areas does not permit or authorize specific aquaculture activities to occur, nor do they change permitting requirements that currently exist for offshore aquaculture. All permitting and environmental review requirements would remain the same for aquaculture operations sited within or outside of AOAs.

However, aquaculture operations sited outside of aquaculture opportunity areas, would likely not benefit from the scientific analysis or public engagement that went into identifying locations and completing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for aquaculture opportunity areas.

And so, what is the goal of this effort? The first is to meet the directives of Executive order 13921. It's to utilize - it's also to utilize a science-based approach to inform the thoughtful planning for offshore marina aquaculture. It's also to find areas that could be suitable for multiple future offshore aquaculture projects, to address interests and concerns regarding offshore aquaculture siting, and the increased demand for seafood.

And last, but certainly not least, to promote American seafood competitiveness, food security, economic growth, while also sustaining and conserving marine resources. I've mentioned the term Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, several times now so far in this presentation.

So, what exactly is a PEIS used for? A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement is a programmatic environmental review document conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires federal agencies to assess the effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions.

A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement assesses the impacts of proposed policies, plans, programs, or projects. It considers adverse and beneficial impacts to the human environment, including ecological, socioeconomic, cultural, and historical impacts. It also assesses the impact of public health and safety, climate change, environmental justice, communities, as well as cumulative impacts.

It also considers a range of alternatives, including a no-action alternative. And one thing that I want to point out with respect to the no-action alternative in the context of the National Environmental Policy Act in this PEIS, is that the no-action alternative in this PEIS, represents no action being taken or no change from the status quo, which would mean that this planning effort to identify aquaculture opportunity areas would not occur, not that aquaculture itself would not occur. It would simply continue on as it currently does, and that is an important distinction to highlight.

NOAA Fisheries is working with a team of federal agency partners to develop this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. We are working with the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Air force, the US Environmental Protection Agency, And Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, all of which are serving as cooperating agencies in this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

The inter-agency team stands at 26 members, with representatives from regional and district offices throughout the Gulf of Mexico. This broad participation ensures the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement will be useful in helping to inform future permitting and environmental review processes for aquaculture. Were also receiving assistance from US Fish and Wildlife Services and the Coast Guard with respect to the roles and expertise as it relates to aquaculture.

On June 1st, 2022, NOAA Fisheries published a federal registered notice with a notice of intent to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the identification of aquaculture opportunity areas in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico and to conduct public scoping meetings.

This notice kicked off a 60-day public comment period that will help to inform the alternative and scope of the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Public comments will be accepted until Monday, August 1st, 2022. Following the scoping period, we will publish a scoping summary and post it on the Gulf AOA PEIS Web site so that the public can see the summary of the comments we received during the scoping period/

After the public scoping period is ended, we will work closely with our federal agency partners, and begin developing the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Once the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement has been developed, there will be an additional opportunity for the public to provide input.

A notice of availability will be published in the Federal Register, and a draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement will be made available for public review, initiating a second public comment period, where stakeholders can provide feedback and input.

NOAA Fisheries will provide a response to those comments received during this comment period in the final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The main thing that I hope everyone takes away from this slide is that stakeholder input is critically important in helping us to shape this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, and that there will be multiple opportunities and ways for the public to weigh in and provide their input in this process.

The timeline in this graphic is representative of the process I just outlined. The publishing of the notice of intent and scoping period, which will extend through summer of 2022, will initiate the two-year process we are aiming for to complete the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

We anticipate having a draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement available for public review and public comments sometime in the fall 2023. We're targeting the spring of 2024 to publish the final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, and sometime in the spring of 2024 with a record of decision published in the summer of 2024.

In the notice of intent, NOAA Fisheries proposes considering the identification of one or more locations referred to as aquaculture opportunity areas, or AOAs, that may be suitable for multiple future offshore aquaculture projects in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and to evaluate the general impacts of siting aquaculture in those locations, which could occur through future proposals and project level review.

The nine locations identified as AOA options in the National Center for Coastal Ocean Sciences Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the US Gulf of Mexico, may be considered in the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, in addition to a no action alternative.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, or NOAA Fisheries, will determine the number and scope of alternatives explored in select locations to be evaluated in the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement by the best available science and comments received during this public scoping period.

For those of you who have not had an opportunity to review the work in the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the US Gulf of Mexico, I strongly encourage you to dive into this comprehensive, peer-reviewed spatial mapping and data analysis, to see how these potential options for aquaculture opportunity areas were identified.

The map on this slide is the result - are the results of the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas and the nine potential options that were identified. So, looking at those potential AOA options, you might see that those locations appear quite some distance from shore, and that is for a couple of reasons.

First, the focus on identifying aquaculture opportunity areas in the Gulf of Mexico was reserved for Federal waters only, which actually avoids conflict in the busy nearshore ocean environment, which is demonstrated and reviewed within the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas.

Engineering and operational requirements for offshore aquaculture were also drivers pushing these potential aquaculture opportunity area options offshore, with the aquaculture industry indicating that a minimal operational depth of at least 50 meters was preferred.

These potential aquaculture opportunity area options range from 50 to 2,000 acres in size, and are anywhere from five to 72 nautical miles from shore. The average distance from shore for these locations is approximately 50 nautical miles from shore, which would take several hours to reach by most vessels, and would not be visible beyond the horizon from shore.

Scale is also an important piece of information when envisioning these potential aquaculture opportunity area options. NOAA Fisheries is considering identifying AOAs in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico make up an area approximately 242,000 square miles in size, or an area slightly smaller than the State of Texas.

I mentioned the aquaculture opportunity area options range from 500 to 2,000 acres in size. So, this slide shows the scale of what that looks like in areas that you may be - may have visited or may be familiar with. 500 acres is roughly equal to 0.79 square miles or 379 football fields, roughly the size of the Port of Miami or Universal Studios.

500 acres also represents 0.0003% of 1% of the Gulf of Mexicos Federal waters total area. 2,000 acres is equal to three square miles, roughly 1,500 football fields or two and a half Central Parks. 2,000 acres also represents 0.001% of 1% of the Gulf of Mexicos Federal waters total area.

Next, I'd like to go through each of the nine aquaculture opportunity area options identified in the atlas and share some basic information about these locations. If you're interested in learning more about these ocean spaces, how they were identified, I strongly encourage you to read the aquaculture opportunity atlas for the US Gulf of Mexico. We also have links to the aquaculture atlas, as well as other maps and resources on our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

The first option that I'll talk about is option W-1, which is a 2,000-acre site off of Texas that sits approximately 35 nautical miles east of Port Mansfield Channel, Texas. Next is option W-4, a 2,000-acre area off of Texas that sits approximately 50 nautical miles southeast of Port Aransas, Texas.

Next is option W-8, a 500-acre area off of Texas that sits approximately 58 nautical miles southeast of Freeport, Texas. Next is option C-3, which is a 2,000-acre area off of Louisiana that sits approximately 72 nautical miles south of Pecan Island, with Morgan City, Louisiana, as the closest town with significant infrastructure.

Next is option C-11, which is a 2,000-acre area off Louisiana that sits approximately 41 nautical mile south of Port Fourchon, Louisiana. Next is option C-13, which is a 500-acre area off of Louisiana that sits approximately five nautical miles south of South Pass, Louisiana.

Next, we have option E-4, which is a 2000-acre area off Florida that sits approximately 58 nautical miles west of the inlet in Clearwater, Florida. Option E-3 is a 2000-acre area off of Florida that sits approximately 49 nautical miles southwest of the mouth of Tampa Bay.

And last is option E-1, which is a 500-acre area off of Florida that sits 56 to 58 nautical miles southwest from the passes off of Fort Meyers, Florida. Again, if you're interested in learning more about these locations, we have a link for the atlas and these maps, as well as other resources on our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

The Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement will discuss the adverse and beneficial impacts of siting aquaculture and potential AOA options, and will likely include discussions on topics, including, but not limited to, animal entanglement, vessel strikes, habitat alteration, disease transmission, escape risk, and genetic impact - genetic impact of escapements, water quality changes, including nutrient, contaminants, and harmful algal blooms, habitat displacement, habitat fragmentation, gear failure risk, including storm and operator error, marine debris, ecosystem impacts, noise, light and visual disturbances, environmental justice impacts, changing climate, cultural and historical resources, tribal communities and resources, local ports, marinas and communities, commercial and recreational fishing, tourism and recreation, public health and safety, transportation and navigation, communication and infrastructure, domestic and international markets, energy development, and military preparedness.

NOAA Fisheries has also identified information and feedback that would be helpful to us as we are developing the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The list of the topics can be found on the notice of intent, as well as our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

The list of - the list includes, the scope of the PEIS analysis, including the range of reasonable alternatives, and how many, or which location should be considered or evaluated, the type of aquaculture, e.g. finfish, shellfish, seaweed, or multi-species, ecologically, economically, and socially suitable species and gear, monitoring and reporting requirements for owners, operators of aquaculture facilities that could mitigate impacts, potential adverse, beneficial, neutral, or cumulative impacts to biological, physical and ecological resources, potential adverse, beneficial, neutral, or cumulative impacts to social, economic or cultural environments, promotion of environmental justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, when considering alternative AOA locations, underserved communities and underrepresented groups and or regions and communities that could either benefit from or be adversely impact by the siting of AOAs in the Gulf of Mexico.

The impacts of climate change and changing environmental conditions, e.g., storm intensity, sea level rise, water quality on siting and other aspects of aquaculture, current or planned activities in or near areas highlighted in this notice and their possible impacts on aquaculture development, or the impact of aquaculture development on those activities.

And last, other topics relevant to the proposed action and its impact on the human environment. As previously mentioned, the public scoping period for the PEIS started on Wednesday, June 1st, and will continue until Monday, August 1st, 2022. Written comments may be submitted by mail or electronically.

To submit written comments by mail, please write to Andrew Richard, Regional Aquaculture Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 263, 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg Florida, 33701, with regard to Gulf AOA PEIS.

To submit comments electronically, please go to the regulations.gov Web site, enter NOAA-NMFS-2022-0044, in the search box, then click on the comment icon. Complete the required fields and enter or attach your comments. If you do not wish to provide any personally-identifying information, you may put N/A in the personal information fields to remain anonymous.

Now will be the opportunity to provide verbal comments during this meeting. Please follow the four steps listed on the slide and join the queue to provide your comments. First, if you have muted your phone, remember to manually unmute your line. Your phone line will remain muted by the operator until it is your turn to provide comments.

Next, use the keypad to press Star 1 to join the comment queue. When prompted, clearly state your first and last name, remain unmuted and wait for the operator to call your name, after which you may provide your public comment. Each commenter will have no longer than three minutes to provide their comments in order to allow for as many participants as possible to provide their comments.

If each of you - if your comment reaches the three-minute mark, the operator will kindly ask you to conclude your remarks so that we may move on to the next participant. If you have any additional comments you would like to provide, you may rejoin the queue by pressing Star 1 to provide additional comments.

As a reminder, there will be two additional virtual scoping meetings to provide comments on the evenings of June 16th and July 12th. We'll keep the slide up on the screen for informational purposes, and we will now open the floor to public comments. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. We will now - we are now ready to begin the public comment section. If you would like to make a comment, again, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad. One moment for our first comments to come in. I am showing no comments at this time.

Again, if you would like to make a comment, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad. Please ensure that your line is unmuted and record your name at the prompt. One moment for our first comment. Our first comment comes from (Sarah) (unintelligible). Your line is open.

(Sarah): Hi. First, I want to thank you for having the webinar, but I must tell you, just as an aside, there's no sound when you hit your link. I'm actually watching it through my iPad, but listening to it audibly from my phone. So, there was some connection where you couldn't uncheck the X next to the sound being off.

I'm the only one that maybe is experiencing this. I don't know, but it's odd that no one else is commenting. Anyway, so to make my comment. The first six bullet points that you had up there as far as the points that are going to be considered in deciding whether these are going to be a go or a no-go, I'm in Florida, and we have had such extreme issues with red tide, too many nutrients in the water.

Water quality issues have been horrendous. The site, I think it was the second to last one that you mentioned, it might have been E-2, the one that's - the one you mentioned to the South of Tampa Bay, that is due west of Siesta Key, which is one of the biggest tourist destinations that we have, and it's been impossible during red tied to even go near the beaches, anywhere in the Suncoast area.

I want to make sure that the studies that are done accurately to determine where all the waste from these fish is going to drift. And I'm very concerned about the antibiotics that are going to be put into the water, because the fish are obviously going to get sick, because in such crowded conditions, how is that not going to affect any other fish in the area? It's water after all. It's going to go everywhere.

So, it's a major concern, and I am a lifelong Florida - born and raised here, and I'd hate to see anything else detrimental happen to our coast. How can we ensure that all these studies are going to be done with the most care and concern? You listed all the agencies that are involved, but how was there coordination between the agencies? I don't know if anyone can answer questions or whether you're just supposed to make comments, but that's the conclusion of my comment.

Coordinator: Thank you. Our next comment comes from Joyce Kouba. Your line is open.

Joyce Kouba: Hello. This is Joyce Kouba, and I'm also in Florida. In fact, I actually know (Sarah), and I'd like to veto do everything she just said. I did want to mention that I actually could not get on the video portion of your meeting at all. I kept getting information about having problems with your server.

So, I guess I'll have to look into that. So, I'm simply listening to what was said. I did not see any of your presentation, but of course, in Florida, I'm representing Siesta Key Association here on Siesta Key. And I know one of your sites, your potential sites, is off the coast of Siesta Key.

As (Sarah) mentioned, we have tremendous problems with red tide, and that is a very considerable concern, of course, with anything that's going to go into the water. What is in the feed that's feeding these fish? And it is - all water goes everywhere. I don't know that you can contain whatever is in your aquaculture area.

So, again, as (Sarah) mentioned, we're very concerned about the studies, and if you have information about the studies themselves and what is being considered and how that is going to be measured or viewed, that would be interesting information. So, thank you for this opportunity and appreciate the presentation, and I will try to get on the next one and hopefully see your presentation. Thank you so much.

Coordinator: Thank you for your comment.

Andrew Richard: Thank you. And I will just clarify, we will be posting the slide deck up on our aquaculture opportunity PEIS Web site. So, that'll be publicly available for people to review.

Joyce Kouba: Good. I was hoping for that.

Andrew Richard: Thank you.

Coordinator: At this time, I'm showing no further comments. Again, as a reminder, if you would like to make a comment, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad. One moment for our next comment. Our next comment comes from Sheldon Rich. Your line is open.

Sheldon Rich: Thank you. I appreciate the presentation. I also was able to get into the slides and then found it a little rudimentary here having to go in on a telephone call when we can certainly typically do these things all by computer these days. But that being aside, share a lot of the comments that the first two speakers, first two commenters made.

Very concerned here in the West Coast of Florida, especially the Sarasota area, where we have had the significant issue with red tide. Clearly, it's been known that nitrogen and phosphorus feed red tide. I would imagine that this experimental fish farm will discharge nitrogen, and we have had many phosphate leaks here, Piney Point being one of them, to drop a significant amount of phosphate into the ocean.

And now we're going to take a fish farm potentially that is going to produce large amounts of nitrogen. Mixing the two of those in is going to cause more algae blooms, I'm sure, and more red tide. I would like to make sure that's included in this is the levels that have been looked at from other offshore industrial fisheries and other nations.

And my understanding is some of those have cause pretty significant algae blooms, and I certainly would like to make sure that NOAA takes that into consideration, and anything that's looked at here in any of these proposals, takes that into account and protects the shoreline.

Our last algae bloom here, I believe, cost about $100 million in lost revenue to the State of Florida in cleanup costs, which are pretty darn significant. So, we may end up fixing one area and causing problems in another area.

I always go back to the issue when we introduced bufo frogs into Florida because we thought that was going to be helpful, and now we've got a lot of our animals dying, especially dogs, that end up getting poisoned by these bufo frogs.

So, sometimes we've got to be careful what we ask for because we just may get it, and it may be not really what we're looking for here. So, I do ask you to be cautious and certainly look at as much of the science as we possibly can here, because just knowing some of this and knowing the science behind it, I just don't understand how we can put these things even 50 miles offshore with such high nitrogen production and then all the other issues that that may cause. So, those are my comments. I appreciate the opportunity.

Coordinator: Thank you for your comment. I'm showing no further comments at this time. Again, please press Star 1 if you would like to make a comment. Again, as a reminder, if you would like to make a public comment, please ensure your line is unmuted and press Star 1 on your telephone keypad, and record your name at the prompt. Again, that is Star 1 if you would like to make a comment.

Andrew Richard: Just a reminder, if you'd like to provide verbal comments, please unmute your phone if you have muted that manually. Use your keypad to press the Star 1 buttons to join the comment queue. And then when prompted, clearly state your first and last name and remain unmuted and wait for the operator to call your name to provide comment. Thank you.

Coordinator: One moment for our next comment. We have (Sarah) (unintelligible). Your line is open.

(Sarah): Hi. So, I understand this isn't the forum for you all to be answering any questions. So, here is a comment. I would hope that the findings of all of the governmental agencies on these sites, not only will be listed for people to view online, but that a final webinar or maybe two, would be taking place to report the findings, especially by geographical area, perhaps three, one to address what's taking place off of Texas, one to address what's taking place off of Louisiana, and a final one to take place, regarding the sites off of Florida.

That way, we can understand what the thinking is. I'm sure the reports are going to be extremely detailed and scientific, but an overview for the layman as far as whether these sites, one, two, or all of the sites off of Florida, would be approved or not approved, and what the reasoning would be, I find - I think that would be very, very helpful to the residents. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you for your comment. Again, as a reminder, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad. Please ensure that your line is unmuted, and record your first and last name at the prompt. One moment for our next comment. Our next comment comes from Andrew Whitehurst. Your line is open.

Andrew Whitehurst: My line is open. Can you hear me?

Andrew Richard: Yes, we can.

Andrew Whitehurst: My name is Andrew - I'm Andrew Whitehurst with Healthy Gulf, the Water Program Director, and I studied aquaculture years ago and worked on a catfish farm. And I know that this is open water aquaculture, but any kind of fish culture situation is essentially a nutrient producer.

Catfish farms can be seen from the air with their various colors of vivid green. So, every catfish pond is an algae bloom on its own. So, whatever else happens out there in the gulf, the nutrients are going to be released from these operations, either from the fishway or the wasted fish feed.

And I'd like to know more how they feed these fish, whether they're floating pellets, sinking pellets, how they contain the waste, because I've seen it firsthand. These, you know, on-land catfish farms are very dirty, and the waste won't be contained in, you know, like a catfish pond, but waste will be produced by any kind of a fish culture operation that feeds daily or multiple times a day.

I need to read more, and I'll be in touch. Thank you for the opportunity to get on tonight and comment. I'll mute again.

Coordinator: Thank you for your comment. Again, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad if you would like to make a comment for tonight's call.

Andrew Richard: This is just a reminder as well that if you do not wish to provide verbal comments this evening, we will be accepting written comments, both via mail, as well as electronically, through Monday, August 1st. So, you can, you know, write a letter, and send it to me at the Southeast Regional Office, at the address on the slide deck, as well as listed in the notice of intent and on our Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

Or you can log on to regulations.gov and provide electronic comments as well through the regulations.gov Web site, with instructions also explained on the notice of intent as well as the Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

So, we'll stand by here for about another 10 minutes or so just in case anybody decides they want to provide any additional verbal comments. If not, we will conclude this meeting right around 8:30. So, a few more minutes here to provide comments. And as I noted, you may also provide written comments through email or electronically through the ways describe previously.

As a reminder, if you would like to provide any verbal comments, first unmute your phone. If you have done so, then use your keypad to press Star 1 to jump into the comment queue. When you're prompted, please state your first and last name and remain unmuted until the operator calls your name for you to provide comment. Thank you.

I will just advance my slide deck here one slide so that you can see my contact information there on the slide deck here. There were a couple of questions that were mentioned here on the call today. And while this forum is only to provide public comment and not to respond to questions, please feel free to reach out to me via email or phone.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have about the AOA PEIS process. Always happy to provide that information. We'll hang on the line here about nine more minutes, and then we will conclude this meeting. As a reminder, there will be two additional public virtual public scoping meetings that we will hold on June 16th, so next week. And then the next one after that will be July 12th.

Information about how to log into the calls as well as the time that those calls will be held, are available in the notice of intent federal register notice, as well as the Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

And if anybody has recently joined the call, and you would like to provide verbal comments, please first unmute your phone if you have muted your device. Use the keypad to press Star 1 to join the comment queue and when prompted, clearly state your first and last name and remain on the line until the operator calls your name, and then you may provide public comment. Thank you.

If anyone on the line would like to provide verbal comments, please unmute your phone. If you have done so, use the keypad to press Star 1, provide your first and last name, and remain on the line for the operator call your name, and then you may provide a comment. Thank you.

For anybody who is interested in additional information regarding the time that the public - virtual public scoping meetings will be held on June 16th and July 12th, the meeting on Thursday, June 16th, will be held at 6:30 - starting at 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time, and will run until 8:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

And the virtual public scoping meeting on Tuesday, July 12th, will start at 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time and end at 9:30 p.m. Eastern Time. We'll stay on for about another four minutes here, and then we will conclude the meeting, and we look forward to, you know, the opportunity to receive public comment next week on June 16th.

Coordinator: We do have a comment. One moment, please. Our next comment comes from David Grossman. Your line is open.

David Grossman: Thank you for taking my public comment and for having these open sessions for us. I too, like a few of the other people, thinking about area E-3, 2,000 acres site about 49 miles from Tampa, which also impacts potentially Sarasota County and Siesta Key and other Barrier Islands.

I'm really concerned about what else could be taught all of us about the transfer of disease and parasites to wild fish populations when aquaculture comes in. I'm also interested in finding out more about antibiotics and in what way hydrogen peroxide is used in the practices of working with the fish.

I'm more than a little bit concerned about doing something like the aquaculture in this part of the gulf, with the susceptibility to severe weather, in parentheses, bad hurricanes, bad tropical storms, and everything else that comes along with our summers here and falls now.

I'm also concerned about predators and disease that may affect wild fish populations that deserve to be left alone. Thank you very much.

Coordinator: Thank you for your comment. Again, as a reminder, if you would like to make a comment, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad. Please ensure that your line is unmuted, and record your name at the prompt.

Andrew Richard: And so, we'll extend our meeting a little bit longer here, just to make sure that we receive all the comments we can during this virtual scoping meeting. But just as a reminder, this will not be the last opportunity to provide comments. June 16th and July 12th will be some additional virtual public scoping meetings, and written comments can be provided at any time during the scoping period, up until Monday, August 1st of 2022.

And again, if you'd like to provide verbal comments, please unmute your phone if youve muted it, press Star 1, and clearly state your first and last name at the prompt. Thank you. We'll be keeping this meeting open here for a couple of more minutes. So, just last call that if you would like to provide verbal comments, please unmute your phone. Use your keypad to press Star 1, and when prompted, clearly state your first and last name to provide a comment. Thank you.

I'll advance one slide here just again to share my contact information. We also have a QR code you can skim your mobile device that will take you to our Gulf of Mexico AOA PEIS Web site. Again, if you have any questions about the effort to identify aquaculture opportunity areas in the Gulf of Mexico, please feel free to send an email to the email address below, as well as contact me at my office line there. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have about the process, or to talk about aquaculture in general. Thanks.

We'll remain on the line here for about another minute or so. So, this is our last opportunity to provide feedback. Again, if you'd like to join the queue, press Star 1 and provide your name, first and last when the prompt allows. All right. Well, it is now 8:35, so I think we will conclude this meeting not having any additional comments in the queue here.

But thank you all so much for everybody who stuck around to this point, for providing comment during our public scoping meeting this evening. Again, this is the first of three virtual public scoping meetings that will take place during this public scoping period, and public comments will continue on through August 1st.

Additional virtual public scoping meetings where the public can provide comment, will take place on June 16th and July 12th. And as a reminder, written comment may be submitted during the scoping period via mail or online through regulations.gov.

For more information and details on how to provide public comment, please visit the notice of intent in the Federal Register, or our Gulf of Mexico AOA PEIS Web site for more information. And as I previously mentioned, please don't hesitate to reach out to me by phone or email if you have any questions about the AOA process. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you again for joining the call this evening, and I hope everybody has a great evening. This concludes our meeting. Thank you.

END