**NWX-DOC CONFERENCING**

**Moderator: ANDREW RICHARD**

**June 16, 2022**

**5:01 pm 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 public comments - part of today's conference call. This call is also being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time.

I would now like to turn the meeting over to your host, Andrew Richard. Thank you sir. You may begin.

Andrew Richard: Thank you (Calvin). Welcome everybody. The meeting will be starting here in just a minute. To listen to the meeting and provide comments participants must call in by phone.

And so the phone number to join this meeting is 800-857-5095. And the participant passcode is 9612327. You will join the call in listen-only mode.

You do not need to mute the phone as the phone line will be muted automatically by the operator and unmuted later if you decide to provide comments. As a reminder these phone lines are being recorded.

Thank you for joining. The Public Scoping Meeting will 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 to visit the Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area Web site. Stand by we'll start in just a minute.

All right, well good evening and thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join this meeting this evening. Tonight NOAA Fisheries will host the second of three virtual public scoping meetings to solicit public comment that will inform the development of the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

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

My name is Andrew Richard, and 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 Wil 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 1 of 2022. This notice initiated a 60-day public comments or public scoping period where NOAA will be soliciting feedback from stakeholders which these virtual public scoping meetings will be 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 intent 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 this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, also known as a 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'll start off my presentation by providing a brief background on the Aquaculture Opportunity Area Initiative, why NOAA Fisheries is undertaking this effort. Next I will talk about a 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 to do this, what areas we are 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 to 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 towards the end of this presentation.

If you are interested in receiving updates about the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement please reach out to the email at the bottom of the screen for more information.

Before we get started I'd like to take - make a couple of important clarifications to emphasize the purpose of this public scoping meeting and to help ensure the comments we received during this scoping sessions are helpful for informing the identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. I would like to remind everyone that the virtual public scoping meeting, held this evening, is to inform the identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas in the Gulf of Mexico which is a planning effort to look for areas suitable for future aquaculture development which could include thin fish, shellfish, seaweed or multi species aquaculture.

Individual proposal for aquaculture projects are separate actions from the identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. NOAA Fisheries is not soliciting comments on specific aquaculture projects including the Ocean Era Velella Epsilon Pilot Project.

The opportunity for the public to provided comments for that project has already occurred. And additionally NOAA Fisheries is not responsible for the issuance of permits related to the project. While we welcome all comments we just want to be clear on the purpose of this specific public scoping period ad the scoping meeting we're holding this evening.

So now on to more information about the Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. In May of 2020 under Section 7 of the Executive Order promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth the Secretary of Commerce, which oversees NOAA and its Fisheries Office, was directed to identify geographic areas suitable for commercial aquaculture, also known as Aquaculture Opportunity Areas or AOAs. And to complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, to assess the impact of citing aquaculture within those locations.

In August of 2022, NOAA Fisheries selected the federal waters of Southern California and the Gulf of Mexico as the first two regions where AOS's may be identified based on a foundation of work completed since - already completed to support AOA development including the sighting analysis and environmental reviews for previous projects, maturity of inter-agency communication and collaboration, industry interests and 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 are specifically referencing offshore locations for citing marine aquaculture. As federal waters 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 marine aquaculture, offshore aquaculture is one method of growing marine organisms done so in open ocean environments. Offshore aquaculture is not exclusive to just growing marine thin fish it is also used to grow shell fish and seaweed as well. Pictured are examples of open ocean seaweed and thin fish 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 70% to 85% of the seafood we consume in the US being imported. Of that amount approximately 50% of that seafood comes from foreign aquacultural production. Pictured are examples of open water thin fish and shellfish farms.

With demand for seafood poised to continue to grow wild caught fisheries alone cannot meet the domestic demand for seafood shellfish, thin fish and seaweed aquaculture are steady sources of safe, nutritious, sustainable seafood for customers 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-tropic or multispecies aquaculture where thin fish, shellfish and seaweed aquaculture grown together and utilize the output of the higher tropic organisms for growth.

Earlier on I mentioned the Executive Order promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth directs NOAA to identify Aquaculture Opportunity Areas or AOAs. So what exactly are AOAs?

An AOA is simply a defined geographic area that has been evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture. AOAs may be suitable for thin fish, shellfish, seaweed or multispecies aquaculture.

NOAA Fisheries we use a combination of scientific analysis and public engagement to identify AOAs that may be environmentally, socially economically suitable for citing 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 the PEIS then? In the PEIS NOAA Fisheries is proposing to identify one or more AOAs in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. To do so we will evaluate the impacts both adverse and beneficial of citing aquaculture in potential AOA locations.

One major distinction between this effort and other aquaculture efforts ongoing in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico is that identifying AOAs is purely a planning process intended to inform future aquaculture development. Identifying AOAs does not permit or authorized specific aquaculture activities to occur nor did they change any permitting requirements that currently exist for offshore aquaculture.

All permitting environmental review requirements would remain the same for aquaculture operations cited within an AOA or outside of an AOA. However, aquaculture operation cited outside of an AOA would likely not benefit from the scientific analysis or public engagement that went into identifying the locations and completing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the AOAs.

And so what is the goal of this effort? The first is to meet the directive of the Executive Order promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth.

It's also to utilize a science based approach to inform the thoughtful planning of offshore marine aquaculture. It's to find areas that could be suitable for multiple future aquaculture projects, to address interests and concerns regarding offshore aquaculture citing and the increase for demand - and the increased demand for seafood. And last but not least to promote American seafood competitiveness, food security, and economic growth while also sustaining and conserving marine resources.

And so I've mentioned the term Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, several times now so far in this presentation. So what exactly is it used for?

A PEIS is a programmatic environmental review document conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act which requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. A PEIS assesses the impact of proposed policies, plans, programs or projects.

It considers impacts both adverse and beneficial to the human environment including the ecological, socioeconomic, cultural and historical environments as well as the impact to 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 I want to point out with respect to the no action alternative in the context of the National Environmental Policy Act and 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 the planning efforts to identify AOAs does not occur, not that aquaculture itself would not occur it would simply continue on as it currently does. And this is an important distinction to highlight.

NOAA Fisheries is working with a team of federal agency partners to develop this PEIS with the US Army Corps of Engineers, US Air Force, US Environmental Protection Agency and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management serving as cooperating agencies. The interagency team stands at 26 members with representatives from regional and district offices throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

This broad participation ensures the PEIS will be useful in helping to inform future permitting and environmental review processes for offshore aquaculture. We are also receiving assistance from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Coast Guard with respect to their roles and expertise as they relate to aquaculture.

On June 1 of 2022 NOAA Fisheries published in the Federal Register 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 kicks off a 60-day public comment period that will help to inform the alternatives and scope of this draft PPP.

Public comment will be accepted until Monday, August 1, 2022. Following the public scoping period we will publish scoping summary and post it to the Gulf Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site, so the public can see the summary of the comments we received. After the public scoping period has ended we will work closely with our federal agency partners to 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 the draft PEIS will be made available for public review initiating an additional public comment period where stakeholders can provide their feedback input.

NOAA Fisheries will provide a response to comments received during this comment period. This response will be included 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 to helping us shape the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. And that there will be multiple opportunities in ways for the public to provide that input during this process.

This timeline is the graphic representation of the process I just outlined. The publishing of the Notice of Intent and scoping period which will extend through the summer of 2022 will initiate the two-year process we are aiming to complete this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

And so now here are the nine Aquaculture Opportunity Area options as they were identified in the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the Gulf of Mexico. In the Notice of Intent NOAA Fisheries proposes considering and identifying one or more locations referred to as Aquaculture Opportunity Areas or, AOAs, that may be suitable for multiple future offshore aquaculture projects in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico and to evaluate the general impacts of citing aquaculture in those locations which could occur through future proposals and project level review.

The nine location identified as AOA options in the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the Gulf of Mexico may be considered in the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement in addition to no action alternative. NMFS will determine the number, or sorry, NOAA Fisheries will determine the number and scope of alternatives explored and select the locations to be evaluated in the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement by the best available science and comments received during the public scoping period.

For those who have not had an opportunity to review the work of the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the Gulf of Mexico I strongly encourage you to dive into this comprehensive peer reviewed spatial mapping and data analysis to see how the potential options for Aquaculture Opportunity Areas were identified. The map on this slide shows the results of the atlas with the nine potential aquaculture opportunity options that were identified.

Looking at those potential options you might see some of the locations appear to be quite some distance from shore, and that's for a couple of reasons. First, the focus on identifying AOAs in the Gulf of Mexico was reserved for federal waters only, which absolutely avoids conflict in the busy near shore ocean environment which is also demonstrated by the work of the atlas.

Engineering and operational requirements for offshore aquaculture were also drivers pushing these potential AOA options offshore. With the aquaculture industry indicating that a minimum operational depth of at least 50 meters was preferred.

These potential AOA options range in size from 500 to 200 - or 500 to 2000 acres. And they are anywhere from five to 72 nautical miles from shore. The average distance from shore of these locations is approximately 50 nautical miles from shore which would take several hours to reach by most vessels and will not be visible beyond the horizon from shore.

Scale is also an important factor and an important piece of information when envisioning this potential AOA options. NOAA Fisheries is considering identifying AOAs in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico Make up an area of approximately 242,000 square miles in size or an area slightly smaller than the state of Texas.

I mentioned the AOA options range from 500 to 2000 acres in size. And so this slide shows what the scale looks like for the areas you may have visited or may be familiar with.

Five hundred acres is equal to roughly 0.79 square miles, or 379 football fields or roughly the size of the Port of Miami or Universal Studios. Five hundred acres also represents 3/10,000 of 1% of the Gulf of Mexico's federal waters total area.

Two thousand acres is equal to roughly three square miles, roughly 1500 football fields or 2-1/2 Central Parks. Two thousand acres also represents 1/1000 of 1% of the Gulf of Mexico's federal waters total area.

Next I'll go through each of the nine AOA options identified in the atlas and share some basic information about these locations. If you are interested in learning more about these ocean spaces and how they were identified I strongly encourage you to read the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the Gulf of Mexico. We have links for these and other - for this resource and other maps on our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Web site.

This slide shows option W1 which is a 2000 acre area off of Texas that sits approximately 35 nautical miles east of Port Mansfield Channel in Texas. Option W4 is a 2000 acre area off of Texas that since approximately 50 nautical miles southeast of Puerto Aransas, Texas.

Option W8 is a 500 acre area off of Texas that sits approximately 58 nautical miles southeast of Freeport, Texas. Option C3 is a 2000 acre area of Louisiana that sits approximately 72 miles south of Pecan Island with Morgan City, Louisiana as the closest town and significant infrastructure.

Option C11 is a 2000 acre area off Louisiana that sits approximately 41 nautical miles south Port Fourchon, Louisiana. Option C13 is a 500 acre area off of Louisiana that sits approximately 5 nautical miles south of the inlet of South Pass, Louisiana.

Option E4 is a 2000 acre area off Florida that sits approximately 58 nautical miles west of the inlet in Clearwater, Florida. Option E3 is a 2000 acre area of Florida that sits approximately 49 nautical miles southwest of the mass of Tampa Bay

Option E1 is a 500 acre area off Florida that sits approximately 56 to 58 nautical miles southwest of the passes off Fort Meyers, Florida. Again, if you're interested in learning more about these locations we have a link to the atlas and these maps as well as other resources on our Gulf of Mexico AOA PEIS Web site.

The Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement will discuss the adverse and beneficial impacts of citing 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, escapement risk and genetic impacts of the escapement, water quality changes including nutrients, contaminants and harmful algal blooms, habitat displacement, habitat fragmentation, gear risk, gear failure risk including storm and operator error, marine debris, ecosystem impacts, noise, light and visual disturbance, environmental justice impacts, change in 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, communications 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 begin to develop our draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The list of topics can be found in the Notice of Intent as well as our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Web site.

The list includes the scope of the PEIS analysis including the range of reasonable alternatives and how many or which locations should be included and evaluated type of aquaculture, e.g., thin fish, shellfish, seaweed, multispecies, ecologically, economically and socially suitable species in here, monitoring and reporting requirements for owners, operators and aquaculture facilities that could mitigate impacts, potential adverse, beneficial, neutral or cumulative impacts to biological, physical and ecological resources, potential adverse, beneficial, neutral, or accumulated impacts to social, economic and 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 or be adversely impacted by the sighting of AOAs in the Gulf of Mexico, the impact of climate change or changing environmental conditions, e.g., storm intensity, sea level rise or water quality, on citing other impacts or other aspects of aquaculture, current or planned activities in near the area is highlighted in this notice and their possible impacts on aquaculture development or the impact of aquaculture development on those activities, other impacts relevant to the proposed action, and it's impact on the human environment.

The public scoping period for this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement started on Wednesday, June 1 of 2022 and will continue until Monday, August 1 of 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 regarding 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 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 NA in the personal information fields to remain anonymous.

Now there will be an opportunity to provide verbal comments during this meeting. Please follow the four steps listed on this slide to join the queue to provide your comments.

First, if you've muted your phone remember to manually unmute your phone. Your phone line will remain unmuted by the operator until it is your turn to provide comments.

Next, use the keypad and 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 as many participants as possible to provide their comments. If your comments reach the three-minute mark the operator will kindly ask you to conclude your remarks so 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 comment.

As a reminder there will be an additional opportunity in a virtual scoping meeting to provide verbal comments on the evening of July 12. We'll keep the slide up on the screen for informational purposes and now open the floor for public comments. Thank you.

Coordinator: We are now ready to begin the public comment section. Again, as a reminder please unmute your phone, press Star 1 and record your name at the prompt.

One moment for our first comment. And our first comment comes (Evan Levy). Your line is open.

(Evan Levy): Good evening. I am (Evan Levy), a law clerk at Center for Food Safety. CFSs longstanding aquaculture program is dedicated to addressing the adverse environmental and public health impacts of industrial aquaculture and improving aquaculture oversight.

CFS has three main concerns with this AOA. First, NMFS selects the legal authority to designate AOAs. In 2018 CSF, along with other conservation and fishing groups, successfully challenged NMFS authority to regulate aquaculture.

The Fifth Circuit Court of appeals, agreeing with the lower court, concluded that the Magnuson Stevens Act, "Unambiguously precludes the agency from creating an aquaculture regime." the Executive Order on promoting American seafood competitiveness and economic growth cannot give NMFS the authority to designate aquaculture when no statutory authority exists therefore this AOA designation exceeds NMFS authority.

Next NMFS must address the following environmental impacts in the PEIS. First thin fish aquaculture routinely results in a massive number of farm fish escapees the adversely affects wild fish stocks. Escaped fish threaten wild fish through competition, interbreeding and disease and parasites transmission.

Second, thin fish aquaculture facilities just discharge excess food, untreated feces, anti-salients, pesticides, drugs, and antibiotics into the surrounding ecosystem. Up to 75% of aquaculture antibiotics are absorbed directly into those surrounding environment instead of the farm fish. Additionally, feces from these facilities can create like polluting the sea floor.

Third, the acoustic deterrence and nets used for aquaculture stress out and entangle a wide variety of marine wildlife from seabirds to migratory whales. Fourth, these operations could essentially privatized large areas of the ocean used for other commercial purposes like fishing, tourism and shipping. NMFS PEIS must address these environmental impacts.

Finally, NMFS must initiate formal programmatic level ESA Section 7 consultation and prepare a biological assessment. The atlas of the gulf indicates that Rice's whale, several threatened and endangered turtles, small teeth sawfishes, giant manta rays, oceanic white tipped sharks, Nassau groupers, sperm whales and gulf sturgeons may be found in the AOA study areas.

ESA regulations make clear that project specific consultations does not receive - relieve NMFS of the requirements for considering the effects of designation of an AOA or multiple AOAs. The only way to ensure that NMFS designation will not jeopardize listed species is to complete programmatic consultation, especially if NMFS designates multiple AOAs in the Gulf because site specific consultation fails to address cumulative impacts.

However, conducting programmatic consultation and addressing CFS's environmental concerns in the PEIS cannot share NMFS ultimate lack of authority to designate this as AOA. As such NMFS should not move forward with the AOA. Thank you for your opportunity to comment today.

Coordinator: Thank you. At this time I'm showing no further comments. Again, if you would like to make a comment, public comment, please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad.

One moment for our next comment. Our next comment comes from (Eric Brazer). Your line is open.

Eric Brazer: Great, thank you very much. Thank you Andrew and the rest of the team for this presentation. My name is Eric Brazer. I'm the Deputy Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance.

We are the largest organization of commercial grouper and snapper fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico. We have membership in all five Gulf states. And they fish in areas adjacent to or in proximity to all of the proposed AOAs.

So we appreciate the opportunity to weigh in here. I plan to offer some initial feedback and comments this evening, but we do look forward to providing more detailed written comments by the deadline.

So, first off again I want to thank Andrew and the rest of the team for the work they've done to date. This really has been a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent process.

Commercial fishermen have had, and will continue to have, opportunities for meaningful input and a proverbial seat at the table. So we're seen as partners and that has built a lot of credibility and respect in the industry. So again, thank you guys for all that you've done this far.

I do have three considerations I want to put out there, in no particular order. Number one, you know, we are interested, the commercial fishing industry is interested in learning a little bit more about what species may be on the table, what species would be kind of, you know, favorable to operations like this? I think there's - will be some misinformation or just a lack of information out there about, you know, what species are, you know, I don't want to say susceptible, what species are likely to be grown in these areas.

And that leads to my second point, you know, I think it's going to be very interesting for this process to identify and delineate impacts to the supply chain, both positive and negative opportunities and challenges that exist when putting more fish into this supply chain. And what those impacts are at every point, wholesale, retail, restaurant all the way down to the consumers plate.

And then finally, you know, we're very interested to see how this process, you know, not just evaluates the state of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem today but how it takes into account the fact that climate change is having an impact in the Gulf of Mexico. So, you know, in particular looking at static versus adaptable analysis, data, et cetera, and what process exists to reevaluate or reassess, you know, if and when environmental and ecological or fishery conditions change over time.

So I'll leave it at that for now? Again, looking forward to continuing to work with you guys. So thank you very much.

Coordinator: Thank you. There are no further comments at this time. Again, if you would like to make a comment please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad.

Andrew Richard: And just a quick reminder if you would like to provide verbal comments first step would be to unmute your phone. If you have muted that phone you may press Star 1 to join the comment queue. When prompted clearly state your first and last name and remain unmuted and wait for the operator call your name, and you'll be able to provide comments.

Coordinator: Our next comment comes from Paul Zajicek. Your line is open.

Paul Zajicek: Thank you. So I have - I'm Paul Zajicek with the National Aquaculture Association. And I have a question, and I don't know if you can answer it, will this presentation be posted to the Web?

And then, I don't know if this is appropriate or not, but for Eric the World Aquaculture Society published I'm an analysis on 18 potentials marine species. And I'd be happy to send you the link to that analysis. And you can contact me at paul@thenaa.net. So paul@thenaa.net. Thank you very much.

Coordinator: Thank you. I'm showing no further comments. Once again, if you would like to make a comment please unmute your phone, 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: And I will let everyone know if you had to our Aquaculture Opportunity Area Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Web site and click the link in the upper right-hand corner to get involved that will take you to a page that has our Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS scoping presentation that was presented this evening.

So you can download that as a PDF and review that as well. So that's available on our Aquaculture Opportunity Area Web site.

And just an initial note as well if you do not feel comfortable providing verbal comments through the verbal scoping meeting this evening you may provide written comments up until August 1. And again here are the two ways to do that.

You can do that by mail by writing to Andrew Richard, Regional Aquaculture Coordinator of NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office at 263 13th Avenue South in St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 with regards to Gulf AOA OO or can log on to www.regulations.gov enter noaa-nmfs-2022-0044 and then add that to the search box. Then click the Comment icon and complete the required fields that were attached to your comments.

And if you don't wish to providing you personally identifying information in those fields you can put NA in those fields to remain anonymous. So there will be opportunity to provide written comment in addition to this virtual public scoping meeting as well as an additional virtual public scoping meeting that will be held on the evening of July 12.

Coordinator: Our next...

Andrew Richard: So as a reminder if you'd like to provide those verbal comments unmute your phone, press Star 1, state your name and wait for the operator to call you.

Coordinator: Our next comment comes from Matt DePaolis. Your line is open.

Matt DePaolis: Hi. Yes, thank you. I'm Matt DePaolis. I am working with the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

And we are a barrier island community in the Gulf of Mexico off the West coast of Florida. And where we're situated and how everything affects us water quality is always at the forefront of whatever we're doing or thinking about.

And I am sure everything related to water quality will be captured in the EIS. But I really just wanted my comments to stress how important it is for the consideration of any addition of extra nutrients being put into the Gulf of Mexico and how that's going to affect people who live in these areas that are constantly under threat of large harmful algal blooms, specifically red tide, but also macro algae blooms.

And when anyone is talking about putting a large what's essentially a CAFO for fish in the Gulf of Mexico, where we know that the red tides are starting. And talking about having a large increase in nutrients in that area it makes everyone on Sanibel and Captiva and the whole west coast of Florida pretty nervous.

So I'm - I just wanted to reiterate that I'm again I'm sure this will be captured in the EIS and there will be a plethora of comments coming in if it's not. But we now know that these anthropogenic sources of nutrients have an exacerbating effect on the red tides in our area.

We have recent research coming out of the University of Florida that says specifically the nutrients that have been put in our watershed and our estuary have exasperated red tide events in our area that have caused millions of dollars worth of damage, caused hundreds of tons of dead sea life to wash up on our beaches. And any sort of input that's going to be adding fish food to the water, adding fish to the water that if a red tide were to occur in one of the areas where these aquaculture farms are being put in could turn into a dead zone.

If a red tide occurs then your stock is killed off which just further feeds the red tide. And all of this just needs to be considered when citing or approving any of these operations. So thank you for giving us this opportunity to comment and look forward to seeing where these projects go. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. I'm sure no further comments at this time. Again, if you would like to make a comment please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad.

Andrew Richard: As I previously mentioned we do have the slide deck and the presentation that was shown this evening up on our Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site. We'll also be posting transcripts of these calls up on that Web site as well for review.

Again if you're interested in providing a written comment you can do so via mail or through the regulations.gov Web site. And the regulations.gov Web site where the written comments are also housed - are available for public review as well through that portal.

And again, if you're interested in providing any verbal comments this evening, unmute your phone. If you've done so press Star 1 to join the queue. State your name and wait for the operator to call, and you can provide comment. Thank you.

Coordinator: Again, I'm showing no further comments at this time, but please press Star 1 if you would like to make a comment.

Andrew Richard: While we wait to see if there are any additional verbal comments for this virtual public scoping meeting I will advance for the next slide here at the end of my presentation. And this does have an email address located at the bottom there that you can reach out if you do have any questions about the PEIS process or would like any additional information regarding Aquaculture Opportunity Areas.

There's also a QR code that you can scan with your mobile device there. And that will take you to the Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site where we have information about the entire AOA process as well as the effort to identify Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, the public comment process and public scoping process for that as well as some frequently asked questions and links to the Aquaculture Opportunity Atlas for the Gulf of Mexico.

So there's a lot of information on there that you can review to give you a sense of kind of what this planning initiative is seeking to undertake. And as a reminder public comment for this aquaculture, identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas in the Gulf of Mexico will be open to the public until Monday, August 1 of 2022.

And just a reminder if you'd like to provide any verbal comments press Star 1 on your phone, clearly state your first and last name and wait for the operator to call you. So we will hang on here for a little bit longer here just to make sure that we don't miss an opportunity for folks to provide any verbal comments that they may be interested in doing so. So I'd say we give it another maybe 12 minutes or so up until 7:30.

If we keep getting some comments we're happy to extend the call here and accept those comments from the public. So again if you'd like to provide verbal comments unmute your phone.

If you've done so press the Star 1 key on your phone. Clearly state your first and last name and then wait for the operator call your name, and then you'll be able to provide your public comment.

And just as a reminder again if you would like to provide written comments in addition to verbal comments or instead of verbal comments you can do so by writing and mailing in your comments to Andrew Richard, Regional Aquaculture Coordinator NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office 26 13th Avenue South St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 with regard to Gulf AOA PEIS.

You may also provide electronic comments through the regulations.gov Web site. And you can do so by typing into the search box on that page noaa-nmfs-2022-0044. And that will take you to the docket page with the Federal Register notice, the Notice of Intent that was published there.

Then you can click on the Comment icon and complete the required search fields. And then you can enter or attach your public comments there.

If you do not wish to provide any personally identifying information you can type NA in those fields to remain anonymous. And through that doctor page you can also look at the previous comments that were provided by other comments. And those will be updated weekly on Monday.

And again if you'd like to join the queue to provide any verbal comments please press Star 1 on your phone and clearly state your first and last name and then the operator was calling you to provide comment. Thank you.

Coordinator: I am showing those further comments at this time. Again, if you would like to make a comment please press Star 1 on your telephone keypad and record your name clearly when prompted. Again, that is Star 1 if you would like to make a public comment at this time.

Andrew Richard: And just as a reminder we have one more virtual public scoping meeting that we will be hosting on Tuesday, July 12. And that will be at 7:30 p.m Eastern Time 6:30 p.m Central Time.

Their links and information on how to participate, how to view this present this presentation as well as listen in are on our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site along with a whole bunch of additional information there as well.

So there will be one additional virtual public scoping meeting. And again any time up until that - the conclusion of the public scoping period on August 1 you may provide written comment either through email or through the regulations.gov Web site. And again we'll hang on here till about 7.30 just in case anybody would like to provide any verbal comments.

Again, if you'd like to provide any verbal comments please unmute your phone. If you've done so press the Star 1 keypad, on your keypad rather. And when prompted please state your first and last name and remain on the line until the operator calls you to provide comment. Thank you.

Coordinator: And I'm 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 your line is unmuted and record your name at the prompt. Again, that is Star 1 if you would like to make a comment

Andrew Richard: And again we'll remain on the line here until about 7:30. If you don't receive any comments then we will conclude this virtual public scoping meeting.

But again I put up on the slide deck here contact information. If you do have any questions regarding the Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS process, as well as public meetings or any other questions that you might have about this process please feel free to reach out to that email there at the bottom with any questions you might have.

And again the public comment deadline for this public scoping period will be Monday, August 1 of 2022. And you can also scan the QR code and that'll take you right to our Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

All right, just a few more minutes here before we're at 7:30. So again if you'd like to provide any verbal comments please unmute your phone. If you've done so press the Star 1 buttons on your keypad. Clearly state your first and last name and remain on mute and wait for the operator to call you to provide your comments.

As a reminder we'll have one more virtual public scoping meeting following this one on Tuesday, July 12. That'll be at 7:30 p.m.Eastern Time, 6:30 Central Time with that information on how to join that scoping meeting through our Gulf of Mexico Aquaculture Opportunity Area PEIS Web site.

And again we will also be accepting written comments during this public scoping period as well which the public comment period deadline will be Monday, August 1 of 2022. Again, you can provide written comments by mail to Andrew Richard, Regional Aquaculture Coordinator NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office at 263 13th Avenue South St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 with regard to Gulf AOA PEIS.

And you may also submit written comments electronically regulations.gov by clicking in the search box noaa-nmfs--2022-0044. That will take you to docket page that has the Notice of Intent as well as the (unintelligible) comment on the Notice of Intent and provide your comment.

You can complete the required fields and enter or attach your comments. And if you do not wish to provide any personally identifying information you can place NA in that box and remain anonymous with your comments as well.

So we have about two minutes left before it is 7:30 here. So again last call. If you would like to provide any verbal comments please unmute your phone.

If you've done so press the keypad and type in Star 1 to join the comment queue. Clearly state your first and last name and remain unmuted and wait for the operator to call your name. And then you may provide your verbal public comment. All right operator, do we have anybody in the queue?

Coordinator: I am showing no comments at this time.

Andrew Richard: All right, thank you very much. So I will move on to the last slide here then. So first of all thank you all for listening in and for those of you who participated in the public scoping meeting this evening.

This was the second of our three virtual public scoping meetings that will take place during the public scoping period which will continue until August 1. Additional virtual public scoping meeting will be held on July 12. And as a reminder written comments may be submitted at any time during the scoping period via mail or online to the regulations.gov Web site.

For more information and details on how you can provide public comment please visit our Notice of Intent in the Federal Register or you can go on to the Gulf of Mexico AOA PEIS Web site for additional information. And as I mentioned please don't hesitate to reach out to me by phone or email if you have any questions or are having trouble accessing any of this information.

So thank you again for joining our call this evening and for providing public comment. I hope everybody has a great evening and this concludes our call, so thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. That concludes today's conference. You may disconnect at this time. Thank you for your participation.

END