

The Oregon Aquaculture Act

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The State of Oregon has a duty to protect the state's natural resources and ecosystems and ensure humane treatment of animals raised for food. The Oregon Aquaculture Act would regulate the treatment of aquatic animals in industrial aquaculture facilities and help protect the environment amidst significant industry expansion in Oregon. The Oregon Aquaculture Act would also bring a diverse group of stakeholders to the table through the rulemaking process.

What is aquaculture?

Oregon State University defines aquaculture as the "breeding, raising and harvesting of fish, shellfish and aquatic plants. Basically, it's farming in water."¹ Aquaculture farms in Oregon raise oysters, clams, trout, bass, catfish, tilapia, and ornamental fish. Though Washington State is the largest producer of hatchery-reared and farmed shellfish in the United States,² the industry in Oregon is growing.³

Why is the Oregon Aquaculture Act necessary?

Aquaculture presents significant environmental and animal welfare risks, which may be mitigated through appropriate regulation.

The high stocking density associated with many fish farms poses a threat to the environment and animal welfare. Such density can facilitate disease outbreaks among fish populations, increasing mortality and morbidity of both farmed and wild fish.⁴ Additionally, many systems risk polluting water and changing water temperature, disrupting entire ecosystems.⁵ The risk of farmed aquatic animals escaping into Oregon waters is also severe. These harms compound existing environmental challenges to Oregon's waterways.

Many aquaculture industry stakeholders recognize the need for and benefits of regulation addressing animal welfare and environmental protection, as current regulations are incomplete and fragmented.⁶



What is the impact of the Oregon Aquaculture Act?

The aquaculture industry in Oregon is growing. In 2021, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration awarded Oregon State University with a \$700,000 grant to help grow the aquaculture industry in the state and create a replicable model for other states. Cautionary tales abound from other states and countries where aquaculture growth has outpaced regulation.⁷ Therefore, given the expected growth of aquaculture in Oregon and awareness of its attendant risks, the state should pass the Oregon Aquaculture Act to regulate the treatment of aquatic animals and protect the environment.

¹"Aquaculture," Oregon State University, accessed June 4, 2022, <https://seagrant.oregonstate.edu/outreach-and-engagement/aquaculture#:~:text=Aquaculture%20is%20breeding%2C%20raising%20and,Basically%2C%20it's%20farming%20in%20water>.

²"Where We Work: Washington," Pacific Shellfish Institute, accessed June 4, 2022, <http://www.pacshell.org/washington.asp>.

³Wendy Culverwell, "Oregon Aims to Double Its Fish Farming Industry to \$23M," *Portland Business Journal*, May 28, 2015, <https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/blog/sbo/2015/05/oregon-aims-to-double-its-fish-farming-industry-to.html>.

⁴Massimo Bedoya, *The Environmental Impacts of Fish Farming* (London: Fish Welfare Initiative, 2021), <https://files.fwi.fish/environmental-impacts.pdf>.

⁵Bedoya, *Environmental Impacts*.

⁶Coalition letter to the U.S. Senate in support of the Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture Act, February 14, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a5f5bfd2278e7d466a4e331/t/620d16482e1fc65ad7886f16/1645024840610/Aquaculture+Coalition+Letter+Senate+Signed+2.14.22.pdf>; Aquarium of the Pacific, *Federal Regulations for Marine Aquaculture in the United States* (Long Beach, CA: Aquarium of the Pacific, n.d.); Chris Loew, "Patchwork of Policies Holding Back US Aquaculture Industry Growth," *SeafoodSource*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/aquaculture/patchwork-of-policies-holding-back-us-aquaculture-industry-growth>.

⁷Helena Horton, "No Routine Checkups on Welfare of Fish at Slaughter, Officials Admit," *Guardian*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/23/no-routine-checkups-on-welfare-of-fish-at-slaughter-officials-admit>.