

2020-06 NAML Position Statement - Response to the Spring 2020 discussion draft of Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture Act (AQUAA)

The National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML) believes the May 2020 draft of the Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture Act (AQUAA) is an important step in the careful and balanced development of offshore aquaculture in areas suited for such development. Of specific interest to the majority of members of NAML is the proposal for a research and development grant program to fund innovative projects focused on improving and advancing U.S. aquaculture along with workforce training and education. AQUAA includes language encouraging the Administration to consider using existing programs that leverage State and local partnerships and take advantage of the expertise, capabilities, and working relationships found in the academic research community. NAML strongly supports the bill's explicit recognition that an effective research program is dependent upon competitive, peer-reviewed extramural grants that support research and extension services. NAML is appreciative that the bill encourages NOAA to consider using existing programs – such as Sea Grant – to fund the research needed for the long-term success of U.S. offshore aquaculture. Using Sea Grant is a very effective way to access the research, education, and extension capabilities of the academic community.

The bill authorizes the statutorily established Office of Aquaculture (OA) within the National Marine Fisheries Service within NOAA to “administer the research and development grant program under section 203 [of the draft bill].” Under the provisions in the draft bill, the Office of Aquaculture would be responsible for implementing the legislation, which includes the process by which policy is established, standards and aquaculture management plans are developed, permits are provided, and oversight and enforcement is carried out. NAML urges the separation of the research and development grant program from the policy making and program execution responsibilities of OA to ensure the integrity of the research program. NAML strongly encourages the addition of language emphasizing equal opportunity and diversity in this grant program.