From: eherkert@cinci.rr.com <eherkert@cinci.rr.com>

To: R4NPDES.Kampachi

Date: 1/30/2020 12:06:15 PM

Subject: Keep factory fish farms out of the Gulf

Dear EPA,

I was alarmed to hear that the EPA is preparing to approve a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit for Velella Epsilon, a marine finfish aquaculture facility in the Gulf of Mexico. I am writing to voice my opposition to this facility, and to marine finfish aquaculture everywhere. Please listen to the overwhelming public opposition and deny the NPDES permit.

These underwater feedlots are bad news all around. They are horrible for the environment and public health. They can cause massive, catastrophic fish spills -- like the release of more than 263,000 Atlantic salmon from a floating feedlot in Washington State in 2017 -- which spread disease, risk genetic degradation, and create unnecessary competition with our already struggling native fish stocks. They attract and harm predators and other wildlife. They are corporate-driven, which only means higher profits at the expense of sustainable operations and quality products. These factory farms are leading to the demise of our wild fishing communities and related industries by placing downward pressure on fishing prices and creating competition for limited marine space.

Moreover, these industrial fish farms directly discharge a whole host of toxins into public waters aside from spilling farmed fish, including anti-foulants, pharmaceuticals, and untreated fish waste. This is the last thing Florida needs, given increasing coral die-off and algal blooms like the red tide. To grant a Clean Water Act NPDES permit for this industry is folly.

Despite Velella Epsilon's proposed plan to operate a "small-scale" pilot facility, it has made clear that it will concurrently seek a commercial permit for a larger, commercial operation. Approving the draft NPDES permit would open the floodgates to massive fish farms, and put our Gulf waters and coastal communities at significant risk.

The EPA is charged with protecting our environment. Permitting industrial ocean fish farms contradicts each aspect of your mission. I urge you to consider the vastly negative public opinion when it comes to this industry and deny the NPDES permit to Velella Epsilon. Please do everything you can to stop further industrialization of our oceans with factory fish farms.

Thank you,

Evonne Herkert

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