



Completion Report for the Initial
Two Tasks Assigned to the
MAFAC Aquaculture Task Force

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ATF Assigned Tasks by NOAA

- **Task 1:** a) Review NOAA progress on 10 Year Plan for Marine Aquaculture; and b) Review new Draft Strategic Priorities and 5 Year Plan for Marine Aquaculture, 2016 to 2020.
- **Task 2:** Provide the IWGA, RTF with a representative commercial project (MOCK PROJECT) and feedback on a Draft Coordinated Permit Process Framework.



Task 1 – ATF Reviews

- Draft new Strategic Priorities were used by NOAA to guide update of the 10 Year Plan. (ATF and MAFAC).
- Progress report on NOAA implementation of the 10 Year Plan was used to identify specific constraints to industry development and to address in new Plan (ATF).
- Draft new 5 Year Strategic Plan, 2016 to 2020 will chart NOAA's future effort to expand the industry (ATF and MAFAC).



Comments on Progress Report

- Lack of a strong and consistent, top-down, agency-wide commitment.
- Failure to issue any commercial permits for finfish culture in federal waters.
- Need to establish a functional Rule to implement the Gulf FMP and permit process.
- Realign the Office of Aquaculture for greater focus on expanding commercial farming in federal waters.



Review Results and Plan Status

Results

- Overall, ATF/MAFAC recommendations had significant impacts on the Draft Plan, pre-public review.
- To illustrate
 - Goals were changed or eliminated.
 - Sections were reorganized or rewritten.
 - Action items were enhanced and added.
 - Greater emphasis was placed on improving the regulatory climate.

Status

- The new 5 Year Plan has not yet been published, so the full impact of ATF/MAFAM review is unknown.



Task 2 – ATF Mock Project Actions

- Development of a representative commercial project (MOCK PROJECT).
- Project details.
 - Name: Gulf Mock Fish Farm.
 - Species: Red drum.
 - Production Level: 12M lbs. (max) at full build out.
 - Permit term: 10 years (max).
 - Site: 33 miles offshore of Matagorda, Texas.

The Coastal Aquaculture Planning and Environmental Sustainability Program of the NOS was very helpful in characterizing the site.



ATF Actions (cont.)

- Review of Draft Pre-application Checklist.
 - Purpose: Guide applicants in gathering information and providing initial project and site descriptions to regulatory agencies.
 - Process was a back and forth between ATF and the GRAC.
 - ATF comments focused on completeness, content, and clarity of list categories and applicant questions.



ATF Actions (cont.)

- Simulated pre-application meeting (Conference Call)
 - Purpose: Present the preliminary projects and site description to the agencies for feedback prior to filling out applications.
 - Stakeholder agencies: NOAA Fisheries, EPA, USCOE, BOEM, USDA, USCG, BSEE, and USFWS.
 - ATF concerns included:
 - GRAC role appears limited to facilitating the NOAA permit, not assisting with all permits and consultations.
 - Conference Call format is not conducive to detailed project discussion.
 - Both the agencies and the applicant need more preparation to maximize benefits.



ATF Actions (cont.)

- Review Draft Permits Guide for Aquaculture in Federal Waters of the Gulf.
 - Purpose: Have experienced fish farmers review the Draft Guide for clarity, completeness and usefulness.
 - ATF suggests the Guide's primary goal should be giving the user a working understanding of the process, e.g., complexity, information needs, time, cost and risk.
 - ATF concerns included:
 - The GRAC should provide overall process facilitation and leadership.
 - Various process and consultation requirements need more detail.
 - There are more helpful resources available than listed.



Results and Status: Gulf Permit

Results

- ATF made numerous comments on the Checklist, Agency Meeting and Permits Guide. The checklist was improved and very few changes were made to the Permits Guide.
- There was a clear difference of opinion about how much detail should be in the Guide.

Status

- Final Rule was filed on January 11, 2016, implementing the FMP and process.
- A web site was launched at NOAA's SE Regional Office in February, 2016 with all the information needed.



Conclusions

- MAFAC Impacts – Beneficial changes to the early Draft 5 Year Plan and Permitting Checklist. Regulatory agencies complimentary of MOCK PROJECT as familiarization tool.
- NOAA and Office of Aquaculture made progress with pending publication of the new 5 Year Plan and launch of Coordinated Process for the Gulf.
- MAFAC Impacts Future – Three activities coming up to further judge impacts, note changes in:
 - Published 5 Year Plan.
 - Staff activities and funding allocations in FY 16 NOAA budget.
 - Staff activities and funding allocations in FY 17 NOAA budget.



Suggested Industry Benchmark

- Gunnar Knapp and Michael Rubino. 2016. “The Political Economics of Marine Aquaculture in the United States.”
- Paper discusses the current status of the U.S. industry and offers broad strategies to foster expansion.
- The strategies are: a) Fixing problems; b) Creating benefits; c) Building partnerships; d) Arguing with opponents successfully; and e) Reforming governance.
- ATF suggestion: MAFAC use this paper as a benchmark (point of reference) to monitor industry progress in the coming years and in 2021, look back and see how far the industry has come.



Thank You

- Thanks to the members of the ATF and MAFAC staff for their work on these tasks.
- Thanks also to MAFAC members for their support of the reports from the Task Force to NOAA.