

Snap to It

Hazards galore: We are puzzled by Josh Schonwald's characterization of the Snapperfarm aquaculture facility as being "eco-sensitive" in the story "A Fish Farmer's Tale" (January 19). One need only go to Snapperfarm's Website to read about the environmental hazards associated with this operation.

Researchers from the University of Miami and elsewhere found that it could take several years to reverse the "significant" reduction in certain sea life near the cages; that the ecosystem could be harmed because opportunistic wild fish are drawn to the cages; and that excess feed and waste could cause sea-life-killing algae blooms. In general, the researchers said open-ocean aquaculture facilities can destroy habitat, spread parasites and disease, alter biodiversity, and damage coral reefs.

The researchers concluded that the "precautionary approach" should be adopted to this technology — "where the polluter is not allowed to continue his operation."

Florida's coastal waters have been abused for decades — by fertilizer runoff from sugar farms, developers who destroy mangrove forests and marshes, reef-ripping and sewage-dumping cruise ships, dioxin from paper mills, mercury from coal-fired power plants, and countless other pollutants from countless other human and industrial sources.

However novel open-ocean aquaculture may seem, the risks far outweigh the benefits. A truly precautionary approach would spare Florida from yet another attack on its environment by forbidding this industry from proliferating until its potential problems are further studied and resolved.

*Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
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*Letter to the Editor
Miami New Times February 2, 2006*

Fish Rap

We love them little critters: Josh Schonwald's article "A Fish Farmer's Tale" (January 19) told a story about fish farmers and their dreams. It described the years of hard work and frustrations our group has endured to fulfill those dreams and goals. The article touted the fact that our operation is "eco-sensitive," because it is. We are very sensitive to environmental issues and do everything we can to maintain an environmentally responsible business. The article was fairly well balanced and discussed the concerns some groups have regarding the sustainability of offshore aquaculture. This is a lot more than can be said about Mr. Hauter's letter in response to the article, "Snap to It" (February 2), which unfairly and inaccurately portrays our company, colleagues, and fledgling industry.

We have posted on our Website an independent environmental monitoring study that commented pollution problems "could" happen if offshore aquaculture operations are not properly planned or managed. Mr. Hauter put together bits and pieces of these comments to make statements out of context in his letter. Indeed, the report concludes with a positive perception of offshore aquaculture.

To improve our operation, our company has been following the suggestions and recommendations from the report. Offshore aquaculture expansion should not go unchecked, and a proper regulator structure will help weed out poorly planned and managed projects.

Other environmental studies are currently underway, and the final reports will become available on our Website when they are complete. Our company and others in the field are working hard to develop a responsible industry here in the United States. It is people like Mr. Hauter who are forcing technology, jobs, and income to other countries, where there will likely be less oversight, less regard for the environment, and less concern for product quality.

*Brian O'Hanlon, president
Snapperfarm, Inc.
Via the Internet*

*Letter to the Editor
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