PUBLIC HEARING ON EPA'S DRAFT NATIONAL POLLUTANT DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM (NPDES) PERMIT KAMPACHI FARMS, LLC - PERMIT NUMBER FL0A00001

JANUARY 28, 2020

Mote Marine Laboratory
WAVE Center
1600 Ken Thompson Parkway
Sarasota, Florida 34236
5:31 p.m. to 9:22 p.m.

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC HEARING

Job No. CS3828654

Stenographically reported by Mary Ann Smith, Registered Professional Reporter, Registered Merit Reporter, Notary Public, State of Florida at Large.

APPEARANCES:

Jeaneanne Gettle (Presiding Officer)
Director, Water Division
U.S. EPA Region 4
Christopher B. Thomas
Chief, Permitting & Grants Branch
Water Division
U.S. EPA Region 4

Jan Connery (Facilitator)
ERG, EPA Contractor

P R O C E E D I N G S

JEANEANNE GETTLE: Good evening. If you will take your seats. If everyone will take their seat, please.

Good evening. I am Jeaneanne Gettle. I am the Director of the Water Division at the United States Environmental Protection Agency in Region 4's office in Atlanta, Georgia. EPA's Regional Administrator, Mary Walker, has designated me as the presiding officer for this hearing. There are several others from the EPA here with me tonight, including Chris Thomas, who is sitting beside me at the table here in the front.

Let me start by thanking each of you for taking the time to be here this evening. We recognize that the Gulf of Mexico is a critically important natural resource of the State of Florida and for our nation. We are holding this public hearing as part of EPA's administrative process in considering issuance of a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, or, as we refer to it, NPDES, permit for an aquatic animal production facility also known as an aquiculture facility.

The facility would be located approximately

43 miles southwest of Sarasota, Florida, in federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The permit applicant is Kampachi Farms, LLC, and it's known as the Velella Epsilon facility.

An NPDES permit is the basic tool that EPA uses for controlling discharges of water pollution. The Clean Water Act requires that NPDES permits include pollutant limits and conditions necessary to protect water quality. The proposed NPDES permit is the control mechanism for the discharge of pollutants from an aquaculture facility.

The NPDES permit does not address the construction of any structure on the sea floor or within the water column above the sea floor and its location in the Gulf. Those entities are regulated separately by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under a separate permit program.

The conditions in this specific draft permit were established pursuant to the Clean Water Act and rules promulgated pursuant to the Clean Water Act. Since this discharge is offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, there are no state water quality standards that are applicable; however, EPA is required to include conditions and requirements

in the permit to ensure that discharges will not cause unreasonable degradation of marine environment.

The main sources of pollutants at issue for discharge from an aquaculture operation such as this facility are from uneaten fish feed, fish feces from the fish being raised, and drugs used at the site to treat certain diseases. Under the provisions of the draft NPDES permit, the permittee would have to comply with a variety of conditions to limit the impact of the discharge on the environment. The NPDES permit includes a comprehensive environmental monitoring plan that requires monitoring for water quality parameters as well as sediment and biological sampling both up and down-current of the facility.

As part of the process for issuing the proposed permit, EPA has also undertaken an analysis of environmental impacts from the proposed discharge and alternatives to the proposed discharge pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. The draft NEPA document was developed with EPA as the lead agency and with two cooperating federal agencies, the National Marine Fishery Service, and the

United States Army Corps of Engineers. That process led to the completion of an Environmental Assessment and a proposed Finding of No Significant Impact on the environment from the discharge by the facility.

As with EPA's draft permit, the Environmental Assessment and the draft proposed Finding of No Significant Impact have also been made available for public review and comment. The NEPA evaluation has its own public comment period and has been running concurrent with the comment period for the draft permit, and at this hearing EPA will take and consider comments both on the NEPA analysis, the draft Finding of No Significant Impact, and on the draft NPDES permit.

EPA's permit process has included complying with other applicable laws by consulting with other federal and state agencies with responsibilities for implementing programs intended to protect environmental resources such as fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. The specific consultations and consistency determinations conducted with federal or state agencies during the NPDES permit

issuance process were under the Endangered Species Act with the National Marine Fishery Service and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, and essential fish habitat consultations to comply with certain provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act with the National Marine Fishery Service, a Fish and Wildlife Consultation Act consultation with the National Marine Fishery Service, a National Historic Preservation Act consultation was conducted with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, a Coastal Zone Management Act consultation with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and a Florida Coastal Management Program consultation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The purpose of this evening's hearing is for EPA to listen to oral comments and receive any written comments that you would like to provide concerning the draft Clean Water Act, NPDES permit, and all supporting documents including the draft Environmental Assessment and the Finding of No Significant Impact.

Any specific information you have with regard

to the proposed facility and the potential impact to the waters it will discharge to will be particularly helpful. EPA's role here tonight is to listen. During this hearing, my EPA colleagues and I may occasionally ask a question of clarification, but we will not otherwise be engaging or responding to the comments.

A court reporter is present to record and prepare a transcript of the public hearing and the transcript will become part of the official administrative record for this permit. In addition, you can continue to provide written comments until February 4, 2020, as described in one of the handouts available this evening. And the handouts are on the table out front. All comments and information provided this evening and up to February 4th will be considered by EPA before making a final decision about the draft NPDES permit.

As I indicated, Mr. Thomas is siting at the front table with me. Mr. Thomas or I will remain at the front table during the entire proceeding. If one of us steps down for a few minutes, I want to assure you all that your comments will still be recorded and considered.

As I said earlier, we have handouts available at the front table. There is a public notice which spells out how you can file written comments on the draft permit, the NEPA analysis, and all supporting documents. There is another handout with a list of web addresses where you can find additional information on the NPDES program, and a web address with information particular to this draft permit, including the draft permit itself, the NEPA analysis, and draft findings and other relevant documents. This document also summarizes the key conditions and requirements contained in the permit and you may request to receive a hard copy of those documents using information on the public notice.

Following the close of the public comment period on February 4, 2020, EPA will review and consider all comments received during the public comment period, both in writing and at today's public hearing. EPA will prepare a document known as a Response to Comments that will briefly describe and address significant issues raised during the comment period and what provisions, if any, in the draft permit have changed as a result of the comments received and the reasons for the

changes. A public notice of the final NPDES permit decision will be published in the Sarasota Herald Tribune.

In addition, the notice of availability of all supporting documents, the Response to Comments, and the final permit decision will be mailed or e-mailed to everyone that commented on the draft permit for which EPA has a mailing or e-mail address. The complete final permit decision and Response to Comments will be available on the EPA website as well.

Within 30 days following notice of a final permit decision, any person who files comments on the draft permit or participated in this public hearing may submit a petition for review of the permit decision to EPA's Environmental Appeals Board, consistent with 40 C.F.R. Section 124.19. In addition, any person who fails to file comments or participate in this public hearing may petition for review of any permit condition in the final permit decision, but only to the extent that those final permit conditions reflect changes from the draft permit.

I want to emphasize at this point that no final NPDES or NEPA decision has been made.

After considering all the comments, data, and information received through February 4th, EPA's regional administrator, Mary Walker, will make a final decision.

At this point, I'm going to turn it over to our facilitator and we will start to hear comments from you. Thank you very much for being here. We appreciate you taking your time to be here.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much, Jeaneanne.

My name is Jan Connery. I'm with ERG. We're a contractor to EPA. As Jeaneanne said, I will be serving as your facilitator this evening. It's great to see so many folks come out for this hearing.

My role as your facilitator is to make sure that everyone here understands the format and agenda and process, and then to administer the process fairly and transparently and help us all maintain a respectful and courteous environment with a particular goal tonight of helping us hear from as many commenters as possible during the time we have available.

I would like to start by briefly reviewing the agenda, which is very simple because the

purpose of this meeting, as Jeaneanne said, is very simple. It's for EPA to hear public comments. And so after my remarks about how the process is going to work, the entire rest of this meeting, except the last very few minutes, is devoted to hearing your comments.

At the very end Jeaneanne will make brief closing remarks, very brief closing remarks, and we will, just heads up, need to have a hard stop here at 9:30 p.m. per requirements of this facility. Because we have had such a high volume of interest in folks who want to make public comments this evening, we are not going to be taking a break, but we certainly understand that you may need to stand up and stretch your legs or if you need to take a call or something you can go outside. And we have restrooms at either side of this room in the back. The men's room is over there and the women's room is right over there.

I'd like to start with -- well, a couple of other logistic remarks just so we get this out of the way. Folks, if you haven't turned off your cell phones or silenced them, pagers, anything that beeps, please take a moment to do that now. And I know you're all familiar with this exit and

entrance because you just came in there, that is our main entrance and exit, but in the event of emergency I just want to point out that we have a couple of other places to exit. There is one right at the back there and there's one over here. So, in the very unlikely event of an emergency, please proceed to the nearest exit.

I'm going to get to how the public comment process works in a moment, but I want to emphasize some basic kind of ground rules for the meeting or, as I prefer to say, ways in which we can all work together to make this a productive meeting.

You can see we have a very full house, which is great. We've got about at least 66 folks who preregistered to comment, probably some others who walked in and would like to comment as well. We've got well over 120 people who are not here to comment tonight, but are here to listen along with EPA. So, therefore, it's really important that throughout this entire meeting we maintain a listening environment out of respect for those who took the time to be here this evening.

So, while anyone is talking, any of our commenters, please maintain silence. And if you

do need to get up for any reason, if you could try to time it when the person at the microphone has just ended their comment, that would be appreciated.

Please help us all maintain a courteous and respectful environment. I do need to mention, if there are any disruptions it's only going to slow the process and reduce the number of commenters that we'll be able to take.

You may have observed we have a few officers with us this evening and they've asked me also to mention that in the event that there are any disruptors they will be asked to leave or escorted out as necessary by the Sarasota Police Department or Federal Protective Service Officers.

So now we get to the public comments and the process. And just an overview, we're going to take folks in two main batches. We had a long registration period that ended about 5:30 yesterday when folks could preregister for comments, so we're going to take those folks first. And I hope that all of you who did register when you walked in the door and you were given a time slot, because we're going to be

taking folks in the order in which they walked in the door and the time slots they were given with preregistered commenters first.

And then as time is allowed, and we certainly hope that it will allow, we're going to do our best to allow as many comments as possible, we will take folks who registered to comment as they walked in this evening. And, folks, if you did that, each of you should have an alphabetical letter. We'll be taking you in order of those alphabetical letters when that time comes. And if you wanted to comment and you don't have one of those, this would be a good time to visit the front desk and make sure to pick up one of those so we can, hopefully, work you in for a comment.

Now, as Jeaneanne mentioned, you can also make written comments and we encourage you to do that. We determined on Friday, because of the large volume of commenters, that we needed really to ask everyone to stay within a three-minute limit so that we could accommodate as many people as possible. And so I expect there may be many of you who have more to say and whether or not you're making a comment, whether three minutes is your complete comment or you have more to say,

you are encouraged to also comment in writing.

And I anticipate that many of you have brought written versions of your comments with you. If you have, we've got two baskets for you I want you to be aware of. There's one over here. So if you're making a comment you can just leave it there on your way out if you run out over here.

And then we've got a basket over there by the exit so if any of you, whether or not you're making oral comments, want to leave a written comment on your way out, please do that at any time. They're highly encouraged.

So now let's get to how this comment process is going to work, how are we going to sort of work together to efficiently help as many people to comment as possible. So this is particularly oriented towards those who are making oral comments. You will be speaking from this microphone.

And, in the interest of having efficient logistics, what we'd like to do is get folks cued up so that -- and we've got a waiting area over here to the left. You see those three chairs over to the side here. We've got three chairs

over to the side here. Whichever is closest for you. So we're going to ask folks to cue up.

So let me give you an example. As we start out, the person who has number 1 -- somebody has a number one in this audience? Oh, there you are. Great. Okay. So you will be our first person up here at the microphone.

And who has 2, 3, and 4? Okay. Great. Three folks on this side. So what you might want to do then is go sit in those chairs and, that way, as soon as the person here who's commenting to begin with has finished in about three minutes and she'll be going back to her seat, then the person who is number 2 will come right up to the microphone and we can begin the next comment.

And so a heads up, 2 plus 3 is 5, so then whoever has 5, we would like them to come up to either side, whichever is most convenient for you. Ideally, if you could, around the edges when you come up to the waiting area and that way we will always have three folks in the cue.

I realize this might sound a little confusing, so I'm happy to give reminders as you need them. If I don't see three folks up here, I will certainly be doing that to help you out.

So what's going to happen when you come up to make your comment, we'd like you to start with your name and affiliation. And if you forget to say that, I'll remind you. At that point we do have a timekeeper who's sitting up here with me, and he's going to start the timing after you've stated your name and affiliation, the organization you represent. And that might be yourself, by the way, for many folks.

And then at two and-a-half minutes we've got a sign we're just going to -- I'm just going to hold it up so the person who's here can see it. That's just 30 seconds left, please think about wrapping up. And then as we get to the three-minute mark. You will see me start to stand after commenting, I'm sitting right there, that will be your cue, please start to wrap it up.

I'm not going to cut you off mid sentence. We want to be courteous. We want folks to be able to, you know, come to the end of the sentence at least, but we also appreciate your cooperation in sticking to the time so that we can have a fair process for everyone and include as many folks as possible. So when you're done

you will just go back to your seat and then the next person will come right up and we'll do that same process again and again for folks.

And if by any chance, this probably won't happen, but you took a little nap or something and you realized, oh, wait, I didn't -- somehow I missed my number, that's okay. Just kind of give me a hand wave and I'm happy to have you come up and we'll fit you right in. If somehow we passed you by, we definitely want to put you in.

And I just want to say one more thing. Again, I hope you don't need it, but if someone is just up here too long and not willing to leave when asked, we have the possibility of the presiding officer may ask for them to be muted. So I hope we don't need to go there, but that could happen if we needed to.

And that pretty much covers it. Yeah. So I think we're ready to begin. Let's get started.

Yes. If you have a question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just need my sign.

JAN CONNERY: Oh, okay. That's fine. Lots of signs.

So the person who's our first commenter with number 1, please would you come up. And then we

have the folks who are 2, 3, and 4.

And I think we have a photo op. moment here, so let's just take a pause while we get that done. Okay.

Your mic is on. Please go ahead, starting with your name and affiliation.

PAULEEN HOME: Good evening. My name is Pauleen Home, and my affiliation is that I'm a winter homeowner and resident of Lakewood Ranch.

Today I'm speaking against the proposed floating fish farm off Sarasota. This is the first aquaculture project of its kind in the Gulf of Mexico, so we must get it right the first time so we have no regrets in the future. The Gulf is already facing so many challenges.

Kampachi, Inc., is doing impressive research when it comes to the advancement of marine aquaculture; however, the issue is their floating net pen is the wrong solution for the shallower warmer waters here off the coast of Sarasota. Indeed, the facility description provided by the EPA is more comparable than not to the Atlantic salmon farms off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. If you do not already know, salmon farms around the world have had a very poor track record. The

industry is learning, however, its impacts on the marine environment have been abundant and clear for those geographies that have gone before us.

Kampachi's floating cage tests have been in the deep and colder ocean waters off the coast of Hawaii. Their anchored test was at a depth of 6,000 feet. Here in the Gulf the cage will be anchored at 130 feet in, what we know, the shallower and warmer waters here, waters that can reach a temperature of up to 90 degrees in the summer season. While the cage can be lowered to 130 feet, in all probability the drop in water temperature will not be enough for such a high concentration of caged fish that we are told will reach 88,000 pounds.

To escape the heat, the fish will need to go deeper into their cage; however, the weight of the fish stacking on top of each other in the bottom of a cage that is 20 feet high has the potential of cutting off oxygen and drowning the fish. This actually happened. It happened last September off the Atlantic Coast. There's not enough time here tonight for me to go into more detail; however, please consider there were millions of pounds of decaying fish in the waters

and shores of those communities.

The EPA permit request says, and I quote, The project will dump waste and unconsumed chemicals into the surrounding waters and onto the seabed. Why don't we just stop there.

So, in closing, do we have an option? Is there a more sustainable way to raise domestic fish? The answer is yes. We all know the future is in closed-containment based systems. These are highly engineered fish farming plants.

JAN CONNERY: You're going to have to wrap it up.

PAULEEN HOME: Okay. I just wanted to close by saying, and some of you already know this, Miami and Washington State are leading the way in North America as early adopters of this state-of-the-art land-based technique. Washington State has already passed that legislation. Canada is about to pass it. So why are we still considering this?

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Thank you very much. If you would like to leave a copy of your written comments, I hope you will leave them there.

Who has the second number? And if anyone has

number 5, this would be a good time. Okay. Very good.

Oh, do you need some help there?

JEANEANNE GETTLE: Why don't we just let her hold the mic. You can just hold the mic.

DIANA CABLE: Can you hear me?

JEANEANNE GETTLE: Yes.

DIANA CABLE: Okay. Hi. My name is Diana Cable. I'm a homeowner in Longboat Key and I'm against the fish farming.

Right now in 21st century we're learning that the earth needs to be cared for. Our greatest issue must be global warming, which we, as a people have got to address. Water.

We have learned that our fresh water source requires our care, that fracking for oil threatens the water which life depends upon, and we have learned that our oceans are not immune to the misuse of industry. Plastics proliferate in the sea as we use and dispose of it, oil threatens it. The Gulf has not recovered from the 2014 Deepwater Horizon spill, the 2004 Gulf tanker oil spill off the Louisiana coast, which is ongoing and poised to surpass the more palliatized Deepwater Horizon in the volume of

oil leaked into the Gulf. Red tide has to do with pollutants in the water.

This would be the context for our discussion of the risky proposal we're debating today. The giant floating fish cage will leak into the Gulf antibiotics and other chemicals along with fish excrement posing a danger to the fish population and contribute to the unnatural growth of toxic algae blooms including red tide.

Denmark has prohibited offshore agriculture. So is the State of Washington moving in the same direction. We are living with an Administration that refuses to acknowledge that the earth needs to be cared for, that the sea is vulnerable as is the atmosphere to our industrial misuse.

The whole economy of Florida requires a healthy Gulf. The National Marine Fisheries Service and NOAA should be protecting our fragile Gulf water and not promoting aquaculture. What we're discussing now is just the foot in the door. We need to prohibit it right now. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. We're going to do number 3 now and whoever is number 6, this would be a good time the come up.

DOUGLAS SMITH: My name is Douglas Smith. I have a background in agriculture and farming and I'm also a recreational fisherman. Since moving to Florida I have had -- I've developed an interest in aquaculture.

I am here to support this project based on the facts set forth in the fact sheet that was submitted to the EPA and not on unsubstantiated beliefs that have created fear on the part of our local residents.

This project is 45 miles offshore with predominant currents away from Florida's coast. There is no foundation for a belief that this project will adversely impact Florida's coast and coastal waters. The EPA has set forth criteria for a point of source discharge that are designed to be environmentally responsible and --

May we hold the signs until I fishing speaking, please.

JAN CONNERY: You can speak to EPA.

DOUGLAS SMITH: Yes. Thank you.

EPA has sponsored -- the sponsor of this demonstration offshore net pen not only meets the EPA standards, but commits to apply Best Management Practices that go beyond those

requirements. The facts predict no detectable ammonia nitrogen beyond 30 meters from the net pen and no detectable accumulation of particulate waste distinguishable from the background levels. The sponsors are required to monitor, as was said during the introduction, the Environmental Impact of this project to ensure that it meets those predictions.

The Almaco Jack used in this project are ideal. They are native to our waters. They are not targeted by commercial fisherman. The fish in the net pens are first generation progeny of wild-caught Almaco and thus the Almaco in the pens are no different than the Almaco that you would catch in the water.

This project is supported by Dr. Nicole Kirchhoff, CEO of Live Advantage Bait, LLC, who has made her own written comments to the panel. Dr. Kirchhoff's experience spans 15 years of commercial aquaculture, including five years working in Australia with a 12-company -- with the 12 companies of the Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association in their 88 commercial offshore bluefin tuna cages as a fish health and welfare researcher.

Her research published and peer-reviewed journals demonstrate that fish caged offshore can have similar health stress levels as wild fish. In the first direct comparison of commercial caged cultures near shore versus offshore, her research demonstrated the further from the shore or the bottom the cages are placed, the healthier and more productive the fish.

Aquacultures rely on clean water for healthy fish and an economic business model. Therefore, the collapse of the local environment also leads to the collapse of the aquaculture industry in the way of economy.

The United States imports 90 percent of its seafood and 50 percent of that seafood is farm raised in environments that are beyond the jurisdiction of the United States. It is important that the United States promote responsible forms of aquaculture within its jurisdiction to meet the current growing demand for the seafood in the United States. This permit would do that.

JAN CONNERY: Are you representing yourself? Thank you, Douglas. Representing himself for the record.

And we will have number 3. And if you're number 6 it's a good time to come up on either side. 7, sorry. 7.

JOSEPH DAVIS: Hello. My name is Joseph Davis. I'm speaking in support of the issuance of the permit for the Kampachi fish farm pilot-scale project. I represent no one except for myself.

I live directly on the water on the small bay that empties into Tampa Bay. I'm an avid fisherman and a boater. I care deeply about the quality of the Gulf water.

I've carefully read the draft Environmental Assessment with its appendices and the draft permit. I was very impressed with the conscientious reviews by the many federal and state agencies involved as well as the engineering and scientific assessments included.

I bring to this review over 25 years experience as an attorney and a senior manager in a federal agency. It's not the first EPA assessment I've seen. It is apparent that this was not a short-cutted process, it is not a result from the Trump Administration cutting back on environmental protections. What it is is a

rigorous process. And you may disagree with it, but the facts are stated in it according to the experts and according to subject matter experts.

In addition to the EPA, more than a half dozen other federal agencies, some of which were mentioned in the introduction, play a key role in this review. Additionally, comments were sought and considered in a number of Florida state agencies, including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. Each of these federal and state agencies agree with moving forward on this project. After examining the model predictions, including worst case scenarios, the EPA has made a preliminary determination that issuance of the NPDES permit, quote, Will not cause a significant environmental impact to water quality or result in any other significant impacts to human health and the national environment.

I also want to note the proposed permit would include ongoing monitoring and reporting standards as well as a provision that allows the EPA to reopen and modify the permit if unexpected issues arise in the process. It's a short-term, approximately one-year process as an experiment. It's not a large, commercial fish farm.

It's well documented there is a dramatic increase in the demand for seafood. It's also without dispute that the United States is a very minor aquaculture producer, but it's a leading global importer of fish. Over half of this imported seafood comes from aquaculture often from countries who have lax environmental standards and even laxer enforcement.

We need to do something to address this issue. And the failure to do so will not only create more pressure to increase catch limits and encourage other nations fishing fleets to violate our standards, we should trust the stats, we should trust the scientists and the subject matter experts as well as the reputable organizations who are involved in this experimental project.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Okay. Number 5. And number 8, if you could come up to the waiting area on either side.

THOMAS CAFFREY: Hello. My name is Tom Caffrey. I'm not representing a group or organization, but I think I'm trying to represent the Gulf of Mexico waters.

So the lifeblood of Florida has always been

its abundant sunshine and pristine waters; however, it's no secret to anyone that the Florida Gulf Coast waters have been plagued over the last several years with the terrible red tide crisis. The exact cause for this over proliferation, this super bloom, is not firmly established, but mounting evidence shows a very strong correlation to excessive nutrients and wastewater in the extent and the duration of these blooms. In addition, there does not seem to be any remedy for this red tide crisis in the immediate or near future. To allow this permit in the very shallow waters in the location of all these uncertainties around the red tide crisis I believe is grossly wrong and environmentally irresponsible.

Mr. Sims and Peters of the Kampachi company had a recent Herald Tribune guest editorial in which they talked about if done responsibly. They referred to a recent collaborative study defining aquaculture as in waters up to 650 deep and excluding areas well used by fishing and recreation. That does not sound like the shallow location for this net pen.

They stated that when net pens are sited

correctly in deeper waters further offshore that there are no significant impacts in either ocean water quality or the sea foliage below the pen. They also state that they have operated such projects before and well understand the issues and that their own environmental assessments have addressed the risk. Personally, I don't think so. I don't think the company clearly understands our Gulf issues and our risk.

According to their website, they conducted two beta trials in Hawaii, one that was a drift method out to 75 feet away from shore, the other that was moored in 6,000 feet of water. However, this net pen location is only 40 to 45 miles offshore of Sarasota in waters that are only 130-feet deep. If you do the math, the net pen is moored 40 feet below the water, it's about 23-feet deep, that means it's only about 67 feet from the bottom of the water. The red tide blooms originate in waters 10 to 40 miles offshore.

This net pen is where the red tide bloom starts. You know, you can't put a toilet boil in near shallow Gulf waters and be surprised when we have a worsening pollution of red tide problems.

Other countries such as Denmark and Canada have moved away from this due to aquatic concerns.

This permit should be denied based on the uncertainty of the long-term native impact on our near-shore Gulf ecosystems. I ask the EPA to live up to the title of their agency, protecting the environment.

JAN CONNERY: Number 6. We are on number 6. Are you number 7? Is anyone number 8? Oh, you're over there. Oh, good. Okay. No, you're all set there, sir. Sorry, didn't see you. Number 9 this would be a time to come up. Great. Thank you so much.

Please go ahead.

SEAN PATTON: Hello. My name is Sean Patton. I'm a member of the Science Environment Council of Southwest Florida. I'm also the science director for the Sarasota Environmental Caucus. Tonight I am here representing myself and my company Stocking Savvy Environmental Consulting.

We all require jobs, we all eat fish, we all eat seafood, and that is something that I'd like to see is new developments, new agricultures, new aquacultures, and that is something that many people here have already spoken very passionately

about tonight. But we also have to realize there are reasons many states are shutting down these fish farms. We are doing aquaculture wrong. We are doing monoculture fish farms that tend to pollute the environment around them, are subject to disease, pests, and generally lowering the water quality.

So I am here tonight to suggest a third option, one that Kampachi Farms has actually already done at other sites. It is to take a page out of the agroecology textbook and to grow other organisms along side the Almaco Jack. This could include macroalgaes, fisher repeaters, and do sustainable ecosystem-based farming.

We already know there's a big drive for seafood in America, know that we already import so much of it, but imagine if we took these warm, salty shallow waters that already grow a large of harmful algae and instead we grow algae that we could eat. Imagine if at the same time we were doing these aquaculture projects and making money and driving our economy we were improving the water quality.

So I suggest that Kampachi Farms go back to some of their previous projects in Hawaii where

they've actually grown macroalgaes, where they have actually done some of these mixed agroecology practices. We like permaculture projects on land. They're good for the environment, you get a wide diversity of food, there's less fertilizer runoff. So why can't we do that here in Sarasota?

If we just walk every new project that comes our way we'll never get anywhere. But if this is the first new project in Gulf of Mexico, let's try out a wide variety of methods, let's try out and see if we can actually improve the water quality at the same time we do aquaculture. That's it. All right.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much, Sean. Okay. Next.

MARILYNNE MARTIN: Good evening. My name is Marilynne Martin. I'm from Venice. I drove all the way up here today because I want to be on the record that I oppose this.

I think this is a terrible idea and I'm not going to use millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lawyers and scientists, I'm just tell you simply. What could go wrong with taking fish where the world was their ocean, putting

them in an extremely small contained area, feeding them GMO soy because you can't get soy that's not GMO, and then we're going to get GMO soy little fishy poop that's going to wander around. And if I drop something out far out at sea, eventually it comes in. I don't care what that gentleman said, it eventually comes in. Okay?

We are a sick nation, you know, and we should learn from what happened on the land. And I think the EPA should go back to those original 20, 30 years ago hearings and I'm sure there was a scientist that said, hey, you know, you want to give a pig 2 feet to live in, okay, that they're going to get sick and you're going to need antibiotics and you going to need chemicals and da-da-da-da, and we know we have a waste problem on land with these confined type of farming.

We need to really rethink it. We are chronically ill, our food is nutrient deficient. Okay? And farms are not sufficient. What we need is more fisher boats, okay, and fishermen. And then you get your jobs.

And then the final point that I want to make is that I do not believe all of these so-called

monitoring. Okay? We had monitoring with the Deep Horizon, whatever, and I remember it being reported about how their emergency plan took good care of the walruses. Okay? And obviously they just copied and paste from the Alaska ones. Okay? So they become meaningless over time.

Keep this out of our Gulf. We don't need it. Put it on land. There's an alternative. They can build a pool and grow the Frankenfish. Okay. They can do that. We don't need it in the Gulf and take the risk. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Number 8. Yeah. And do we have 10 and 11? Oh good. Okay.

THOMAS SURPRISE: I'm Tom Surprise. I'm with the Siesta Key Association.

I am for our business people getting new sources of income, but on this particular project I'm kind of negative due to the simple fact that I've got four questions which concern thinking beyond tomorrow. There's too many things going on that they go and they do a good project, they make it look good for the first day, and then down the road it becomes horrible more than any other.

I would like to know how long Kampachi Fish

Farms did their Hawaii project. They talk about a year. It's not enough. I'm talking about looking farther down the road than that.

They also have several other projects, I understand, in the U.S. that they said nothing about. What negative came out of these projects? I didn't hear anything about that. I would like to hear about that.

I'm thinking that the negative results now down the road can become very bad. I will tell you after I run through my four items why.

The second -- first item, or the second item I have is what are they doing to prevent discharge of the elements. I hear they're going to be within the limits. That doesn't mean anything. All that means is, oh, yeah, we'll do it. It doesn't mean anything.

I'd like to know what they're going to do because where we get our red tide from is where they're dumping. We're down, we come in from out there, we come in on currents. What's to prevent their discharges to come in on the currents.

The third one I have is how many negative things are they putting in here that are not natural to the area. Somebody said something

about the fish was natural. I saw two and or three fish and a couple of them I didn't see that were natural to this area.

Number 4, that's my last question. What precautions will be taken care of to prevent the negative developments from taking over? We have things like -- a thing called a hurricane comes in now and then. It tears up everything.

These things are going to get tore up. They start leaking, they're going to dump stuff that doesn't belong there. Next thing you know, it's come in and we get the red tide.

I have two items that -- am I done?

JAN CONNERY: Can you wrap up?

THOMAS SURPRISE: I have two items very quickly that they were very good ideas to start with when they went out. One of them is kudzu. In the State of Georgia the highway department thought they could put it along side the highways and they wouldn't have to mow highways anymore. It's a vine. It doesn't breed. It went beyond the right of way.

JAN CONNERY: Tom, you're going to need to wrap it up.

THOMAS SURPRISE: Killed trees and everything

else. The other one very quickly is Nutrigrass in New Orleans. They started out as a very good thing and they ended up, I lived there, and they were very, very bad. They caused a lot of problems many times.

JAN CONNERY: Great. Thanks so much. You must be number 9?

KEN JAROS: I am. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: We have 10, 11, and a good time for 12 to come up on either side, whichever is most convenient.

KEN JAROS: Thanks for being here. I'm going to start with a little history and I had a personal experience with this. I'm going to have three questions and I'm going to follow up.

JAN CONNERY: Could you give your name and affiliation, please.

KEN JAROS: Yes, I will. And then I will follow up with a conclusion.

My name is Ken Jaros. J-a-r-o-s. I live in Lee County, Florida, on the water.

On July 9, 2018, the Florida governor declared a state of emergency in seven Florida counties to combat the toxic green algal bloom and toxic red tide bloom. At the end of the

declared state of emergency, Lee County reported that contractors removing dead sea life from Lee County beaches had amassed more than 4,850,169 pounds of sea life and the crews on Sanibel had collected an additional 936,964 pounds. Adding the two numbers together, we get 5,787,133 pounds of dead sea life that washed up on our beaches, including a whale shark, goliath groupers, tarpons, manatees, and turtles. It's unknown how many billions of pounds of sea life perished that didn't wash up on our beaches but floated out to sea or ended up rotting on the bottom.

We should be asking the question do we need more pollution from fish food and the waste it becomes? Do we really want to directly discharge toxins like the untreated fish waste and pharmaceuticals into our water for the financial gain of a few individuals? Do we want the whole State of Florida to be a Super Fund Site?

It's shocking that we're even here discussing the possibility of issuing a permit to dump untreated waste from the first-ever floating industrial fish factory in the Gulf of Mexico. I believe our health, our water, our economy, and our quality of life are all dependent on strong

environmental safeguards. I am strongly opposed to the discharge of industrial wastewater in the Gulf of Mexico. It's time to heal our water and environment. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. You must be number 11. Or you're 10. Okay. So we've got 11 and 12.

DEBORAH JAROS: Some people wouldn't say that.

JAN CONNERY: 10, 11, 12. If we have number 13, good time to come up. You're right there. Okay. Perfect.

DEBORAH JAROS: My name is Deborah Jaros, and I live in Cape Coral, Florida. And I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm here as a Floridian, though I do belong to many groups, but I am strongly opposed to this permit.

The Environmental Protection Agency has the duty to protect the environment. To allow this permit by deciding that this facility will not have a significant impact is to disregard this duty and commitment to the people of Florida and to Americans across the U.S.

For the past decade many agencies have joined together to help restore and revive the Gulf

waters after the devastation caused by Deepwater Horizon. We can all remember the heartbreaking images of shorebirds, turtles, and other marine life covered in oil struggling to survive. More recently, Floridians have been impacted by devastating algal blooms and red tide. The images of literally tons of marine life washed upon Florida shorelines are still fresh in our minds.

We do not need another source of pollution to fuel these problems or to create new ones. Any impact is a significant impact. And there will be an impact.

I urge you to deny this permit. Do your duty to protect our environment. All life depends on it.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Do we have number 11?

JIM MICHAELS: Good evening. Good evening. My name is Jim Michaels. I'm here representing myself and my company.

I have been an aquaculture consultant and I own a company called Aquaculture Consulting Services. I've been in involved in the aquaculture industry for more than 40 years, and

although I'm not involved in any way in this project, I've been watching the development of offshore aquaculture in federal waters, or the lack thereof, for a very long time.

It's a generally accepted fact that our oceans are sustainable yields. More fishermen is not going to bring more fish. We're getting what we can out of the oceans.

The only solution to supply the global increase demand for seafood is aquaculture. That's just simply a fact. And despite the U.S. being the leading global importer of seafood, it ranks 16th in seafood production on a global basis.

As stated before, nearly 90 percent of what we eat is imported and that is creating a $14 billion a year seafood trade deficit. If you layer on the fact that the U.S. per capita seafood consumption continues to increase and over the past three reported years that increase has been another 7 percent, this country has a real seafood problem. Also layer the fact that the U.S. aquaculture production is some of the most highly regulated production in the world. There is no safer seafood than seafood that is

produced in the U.S.

Responsible offshore aquaculture production can play a significant role in solving this seafood problem. Neil Sims, who has been mentioned, the CEO of Kampachi Farms, has been a leading innovator in offshore aquaculture for more than 15 years. I can't think of anybody more qualified than Neil and Kampachi to do this project.

I realize that emotion plays a big role in opposing a project such as this, but the reality is that there's sound published science backing up the fact that a pilot project such as this will have zero long-term impact on the environment and, in fact, the short-term impact parameters will mostly likely be at or below measurable detectable levels.

This pilot project is a single pilot project to produce 88,000 pounds of Almaco Jack. As a pilot project, everything associated with this project is going to be scrutinized and measured. Instead of conjecture, we're going to receive facts and data. This project is essential for both the aquaculture industry and for regulators such as yourself. I strongly urge you to issue

the NPDES permit so that this project can proceed forward. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Folks, we're going to hear a variety of comments tonight. Let's maintain an atmosphere of respect, please.

You are number 12. And who has 13 and 14 and 15? It would be a good time for you to come up.

KEVAN MAIN: My name is Kevan Main. I received my Ph.D. in marine ecology from Florida State University, and I'm a past president of the World Aquaculture Society. I'm also the director of aquaculture research for Mote Marine Laboratory.

At Mote Marine we have been developing the hatchery technologies to produce Almaco Jacks for the past three years with funding from Florida Sea Grant and from the Gulf State Marine Fisheries Commission. As a result, we have at our zero discharge inland recirculating aquaculture facility, Mote Aquaculture Park, currently we're maintaining a spawning population of wild Almaco Jacks from local Gulf waters. These grants also provide funding for Mote to produce fingerling fish for the Kampachi Farms demonstration project if that project receives

the proper permits.

I want to make it clear that my comments are not the official statement or position of Mote Marine Laboratory; rather, my comments are based on over 30 years of professional experience in the field of aquaculture and research around the world. I'm here tonight to speak in support of expanding U.S. marine aquaculture production and in support of the Kampachi Fish Farms permit application for the Velella Epsilon project.

Time is of the essence in developing U.S. marine aquaculture industry. The U.S. has lagged far behind other countries in developing marine aquaculture, which has created a huge seafood trade deficit. $14 billion second only to the import of oil.

In addition, we have over 91 percent of the seafood that we eat here in Florida and in the United States is imported and half of that is farmed. Worldwide, finfish is the lowest cost protein and a growing seafood supply gap disproportionately affects the nutrition and health of the poor. An analysis conducted in 2006 by an international team of ecologists and economists published in the Journals of Science

showed that -- predicted the possibility of collapse of all seafood species by 2048. This is happening at the same time that the U.S. medical community is calling for us to eat more high-quality seafood products, especially those are that are high in omega 3 fatty acids, which are plentiful in marine fish.

The U.S. needs to take a balanced approach to dealing with our seafood supply dilemma. Many of the criticisms of aquaculture are based on outdated practices that were abandoned years ago as people learned how to do farming better. There are best management practices that have been developed and scientists and fish farmers are working with those technologies. There are also many peer-reviewed scientific publications supporting the development of marine aquaculture to produce high-quality protein to feed the world's growing fish population.

The Kampachi Farms demonstration project is a vital first step in providing the needed data to develop the development of sustainable offshore aquaculture. It's a demonstration to develop data. So with that I would like to say that we need to do this in a manner that is both

environmentally sustainable and provides the information that we need.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you.

KAFI BENZ: Initially I'd like to say that I do have a much more extensive contribution and I've submitted it in writing and it will be available.

JAN CONNERY: Could you give us your name.

KAFI BENZ: Yeah. We consulted a good number of scientists and researched a lot. Information will be attached.

My name is Kafi Benz, and I'm president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations.

Scientific speculation generally agrees that it is unlikely for the proposed pilot project to yield negative results because of its size. Small scale. That small scale also makes it unlikely for the proposed pilot project to be able to provide scientific data that could justify the initiation of commercial finfish farming in federal waters above the shallow shelf along the western coast of Florida.

The proposal has been drafted to include some

admirable parameters, such as the species chosen, recognition of the important factors regarding aquaculture and our needs for it, but our research regarding the proposed pilot project has led us to the conclusion that this current proposal is inappropriate for the site. We have suggestions that we will make regarding aquaculture, potentially even in the Gulf of Mexico, afterward.

The proposed pilot project will not contribute any data that could justify a decision for permitting commercial finfish farming along the western coast of Florida. Essentially, it seems a waste of resources and finances to proceed with the proposed project and it could exacerbate existing conditions.

The location of this proposed project is documented as an epicenter of nascent algal bloom incubation and it has been identified as the location of red tide factors that readily may be fed to bloom with the introduction of more nutrients in what already is a delicate balance. It may flare up quickly in great volume and wreak havoc on our environment and our health.

The currents in the Gulf are weak, unlike

those that can be found away from the continental shelf in deep water. Even with our weak currents, a single pen may yield no significant increase in nutrients because of the dilution, but a single pen could never be a commercial success and a commercial project would have to include many pens that quickly would exceed the threshold of dilution. Furthermore, feeding an artificial and stationary population of finfish in that location may attract the Karenia brevis red tide algae. They can swim, you know. Two sources.

I'm running out of time.

Our existing hard bottom is very important to the Gulf of Mexico and it supports a good number of species that we use for recreational and commercial fishing. That needs to be protected. Even in a storm they cannot get this pen lower than a certain dimension on our shallow shelf and our storm period extends six months into this one-year project. It just doesn't work out well.

Please look at my notes that will be attached electronically to this. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. Number 14. 14 over there. You're 15. And 16, do we

have 16? Be a good time to come up. Thank you. Please go ahead.

JUSTIN BLOOM: Hi. My name is Justin Bloom. I'm with Suncoast Waterkeeper, a Sarasota based nonprofit environmental organization with members and supporters throughout Southwest Florida.

We do not subscribe to a fundamental objection to offshore aquaculture. We recognize the need for reliable sources of healthy seafood and see the potential for such facilities to compliment traditional commercial fishing communities with minimal environmental impacts. However, we object to the issuance of this permit as drafted given the inadequate public awareness and review, the failure to comply with required regulatory reviews and consultations, and, most importantly, the risk of cumulative environmental harm from this and the larger projects that are likely to follow.

It's our position that federal law calls for more thorough review and analysis in the form of a full environmental impact study of the potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts from the project and any alternatives available to the applicant. EPA reviewed the abbreviated

Environmental Assessment and made an inappropriate and, arguably, illegal determination that the project would have no significant impact and did not trigger a full EIS review. Key to that determination was their failure to look at the reasonably foreseeable expansion of the current proposal beyond its pilot stage.

The law requires and we demand a cumulative impact analysis of potential impacts from the likely proliferation of fish farms on our coasts. That is the key to our opposition.

While this pilot project raises numerous issues, our significant concern has to do with improperly regulated growth of an industry that is fraught with risk. Individual NPDES permit reviews will not adequately protect us from potential impacts of a commercial fish farm industry off our coast. There is no adequate regulatory regime in place to deal with the expansion of offshore aquaculture in federal waters.

NOAA attempted to regulate offshore finfish aquaculture while being tasked at the same time with promoting the same industry. The courts

found that NOAA lacked the authority to do so. While the regulatory regime is unsettled pending appellate review and further legislation, the industry and its partners are trying to sidestep comprehensive regulation via an abbreviated NPDES review.

NPDES permits have been a colossal failure in Florida. There are inadequate permit requirements, there has been practically no enforcement, and the result has been a nightmare of urban, agricultural, and industrial pollution. We're seeing the impacts of that now with declining water quality, reduction of sea grasses and horrific algae blooms.

Considering the potential environmental impacts and the regulatory uncertainties surrounding offshore finfish aquaculture in the Gulf, we're asking the EPA to take a step back, deny this permit, and asking our regulatory agencies together to take a hard look at whether this type of industrial aquaculture is appropriate for the Gulf coast.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you.

RONALD KASHDEN: I'll just hold the mic. Can you hear me? Great.

Ron Kashden, homeowner of the City of Sarasota.

The effect of the proposed fishery on the growth and perpetuation of red tide is a concern shared by everyone in this hearing. It was a concern for the EPA and such a concern that they devoted a section of its discussion in their ocean discharge criteria evaluation, which is Section 9.2.5, page 36.

In that discussion the EPA stated that the expected materials and chemicals that would normally be released through this fish farm normally feed harmful algae group of blooms in the nitrogen-limited waters of the Gulf. However, it goes on to state that there is no scientific evidence that suggests a causality between the fisheries and red tide. And the way they cite that is they go back to the world-renowned algae expert, Professor Graham Harris, and the work he did in 1984.

Well, we reached out to Professor Harris because we thought that that sounded like antiquated studies. Well, Professor Harris got back to us. He was, one, surprised that such outdated studies were still being referenced.

He then went on to state that there was extensive research that proves just the opposite. He went on to state that nitrogen additions are the main cause of prolonged algae blooms. So the EPA's own cited expert comes back and says that fisheries are linked to harmful algae blooms.

So, with that, with the EPA's own expert in there and that we know that there are expected algae blooms, let's talk about red tide and what the impact is to the community. For the moment, let's forget about the asthma and the other health concerns that occurs. Let's also forget about the quarantined beaches. And, for the moment, let's also forget about our own restrictive lives.

Since this is a proposal for a business, let's talk in pure economic terms. The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council used data from the State of Florida to determine the economic impact for the last bad red tide bloom which occurred in 2018. So the Council came back and concluded that Florida sustained $96.4 million in damages to the local economy.

So if you look at this proposal in purely business economic terms, Kampachi would need to

have a yearly profit of -- almost done -- of $96.4 million in order to break even from the damage that's going to be caused by red tide. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Number 16; right?

GLENN COMPTON: Number 16.

JAN CONNERY: 16. Good time for number 19 to come up if you would like to do that.

GLENN COMPTON: My name is Glenn Compton. I'm here on behalf of ManaSota-88. We're a not-for-profit public health environmental organization in Manatee and Sarasota County.

We've submitted extensive comments on this. I don't want to go over all of them, that's for sure. I'm only going to focus on one.

One of our main concerns is that this is only an Environmental Assessment that is being done for this project. This is of the magnitude that it should be hooked up to an environmental impact study. At this point, and probably in the future if ever one was to be done, we are recommending denial of the Environmental Assessment.

One of our main concerns is water quality monitoring. And typically with an NPDES permit you have specific outfalls where you can monitor

the discharge offsite on a regular basis and on a consistent basis, if necessary.

This is an open water discharge. So whether or not you're going to be able to pick up the problem is more going to be associated with which way the wind blows and which way the current is going to flow. And that's not adequate. Especially with this being the first of possibly many projects that are going to be proposed in the Gulf of Mexico.

As far as red tide goes, the statement has been made that this probably will not contribute to the red tide problem that we have in the Gulf of Mexico, but, conversely, you can't say that it won't. So our recommendation at this point is to have EPA err on the side of caution, recommend that this be denied as environmentally unsatisfactory, make that recommendation to the Army Corps of Engineers with the hope that they will have the same recommendation. And as far as this goes, not here, not ever.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Thank you. Number 17. Yes. And we have 18, 19, and 20, are you -- can you come up. Be right there. Okay. Thank you.

DENNIS PETERS: Good evening. My name is Dennis Peters, and I am the project manager and permit coordinator for the Velella Epsilon project and team Kampachi.

And I would like to thank many of the proponents and opponents for this project that already quoted accurately from Mr. Sims earlier tonight. You will hear some of the statements again from his work.

As a seasoned oceanographer, fisheries biologist, and recreational fisherman, my experience spans across the marine species propagation, conservation, and protection in the Gulf of Mexico.

To summarize the project before us tonight, the Velella Epsilon will validate the feasibility of the single, temporary small-scale demonstration net pen to conduct comprehensive environmental monitoring of water quality, benthic analysis per EPA and core requirements while addressing public concerns of offshore open-ocean aquaculture in the Gulf by encouraging public and tourists to visit the demonstration site for themselves.

In preparation of this project, countless

hours of formal and informal discussions have been devoted toward the coordination and collaboration with representatives of multiple federal and state agencies as well as with commercial and recreational fisheries and other user groups of the ocean.

This extensive coordination allowed us to perform a comprehensive site analysis that originally considered 18 initial sites across the Sarasota area that led to the final selection of one site to target the appropriate water depth, currents, substrate, and temperature regimes while avoiding sensitive marine habitats and benthic species and de-conflicting the activities with other user groups of the Gulf of Mexico.

Although offshore aquaculture in federal waters is a new industry to the Gulf of Mexico, there is already plenty of sound science that shows when net pens are sited correctly in deeper water further offshore and when these systems are managed according to well-established practices, there are no significant impacts on the water quality, sea floor habitats, or on the wild fish or other wildlife around the net pens.

Our team has operated similar offshore

projects before and we understand the issues. Our comprehensive Environmental Assessment has addressed these concerns.

We are only using local wild native-caught brood stock from the Sarasota region to produce the fingerlings, as you heard earlier tonight from Mote. We are going to use a robust net pen system designed to minimize the risk of escapes and marine mammal entanglement. We will use high-quality pelleted diet that optimizes fish health and produces a superb sashimi-grade product while minimizing the use of fishmeal and fish oil.

The Velella Epsilon project is just one temporary demonstration project, but it also serves as an opportunity for us to share with all users of the Gulf of Mexico and for them to see for themselves that such operations can safely produce much needed quality seafood with minimal environmental effects and broad benefits the local and global environment.

Our team is committed to complying with all the federal and state local requirements while continuing close coordination with the agencies and Gulf of Mexico stakeholders. Our team also

recognizes that we have but one opportunity to get it right the first time while doing no harm to the environment, yet serving as an example in the highest standard for others to follow. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. I believe we're up to number 18 at this point. Number 18?

SANDY GILBERT: I'm here.

JAN CONNERY: And number 21, be a good time to come up if you'd like, to the side.

SANDY GILBERT: Good evening, everyone. I'm Sandy Gilbert. I'm the chairman and CEO of START, Solutions To Avoid Red Tide.

We generally favor aquaculture. We think it's needed. When we say that we mean closed-in aquaculture and viable aquaculture and, as a result, we're for that. And we're definitely against this project. There are four reasons why.

We already have too many excess nutrients in our waterways. We don't want more. You've seen signs. Stronger and longer lasting red tides, more frequent algal blooms of other kinds that I've been here 20 years and we haven't seen before.

Decline in sea grass. We already have a nutrient impaired parts of our very lower surface of the bay right now before this comes.

Number 2, the project is counterproductive to the State's work dealing with the Lake Okeechobee releases and our own local government's working hard to reduce the nutrients of the waterway. It's contradictory to what we're trying to do.

Number 3, it's been said by others, it's located in the exact wrong place. Right where red tide starts. Wrong place.

And last, I don't like the arguments I've heard from the folks supporting this, the people from Kampachi Farms. First of all, huge studies -- this is a quote -- report ecological effects. There will be ecological effects.

Nutrients from the pen help support existing wildlife stock. Not really. Nutrients from the pen will only be effective for, quote, 90 meters in the ocean. Have you heard of the current that brings everything to our shores? Definitely incorrect.

And we also know it's incorrect because of what they said in their newspaper report this morning, that they're so excited that every

morning in Hawaii 30 fishing boats are lined up outside the pens to fish the wild stock. And they note, that includes tuna and Marlin. Those two species are gone in the Gulf of Mexico right now by about 80 percent.

This is just a fishing station for wild stock. And in case you think that's just intuitive on my part, there are three research studies that prove when you have a pen your wild stock outside it will decline.

So the nutrients are bad, we don't want it. Stop this thing. Listen to the people and do the right kind of aquaculture. Closed-in. This isn't it.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Number 19. And if you're number 22, it's a good time to come up on either side.

RUSTY CHINNIS: My name is Rusty Chinnis. I do not have a prepared statement. I came here tonight to listen. I certainly have an opinion and you will find out about that.

I have been in the area since 1981. I'm a fisherman. And because I'm a fisherman and because I care about the waters, I've been involved over the years with a number of

organizations who are working hard to try to preserve our environment and our fisheries, water quality and habitat. That includes the Florida Conservation Association that is now the Coastal Conservation Association, also a group called the Sister Keys Conservancy that formed back in the late '80s in order to protect some islands in Sarasota Bay.

Then I became concerned after all the red tide events that we have and with myself and some others we formed an organization in 2007 called Sarasota Bay Watch. But I want to make it clear that I'm here tonight to speak on my own behalf and not for any organization in particular.

But it just seems like a lot of people have expressed the same feelings that I have tonight that I'm not against aquaculture, I think it's something that we definitely need. I just think that the method and the siting is all wrong with the red tide problems that we've had, with the nutrient loading from infrastructure, it just seems like this off the coast of Sarasota in this shallow water is possibly the worst possible location and not the best.

So I encourage the EPA to deny this permit or

to alter it so it could be done right. I agree a land-based aquaculture system has so much more potential. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. We have a 21. I invite whoever has 23 to come on up to the side.

RALEIGH HOKE: Hello. My name is Raleigh Hoke. I'm with Healthy Gulf, an environmental nonprofit focused on hire people to protect and restore the natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico region.

We strongly oppose EPA's issuance of this pollutant discharge permit for this proposed offshore fish farm because of the impacts that it will have on the Gulf of Mexico's environment and the people who rely on a healthy Gulf.

In recent years, Florida's Gulf Coast has experienced serious red tide and blue-green algae blooms that have had far-reaching impacts on our coastal economies, people's health, and wildlife. These events are in part driven by the nitrogen and phosphorous pollution and permitting this facility will only add more of that pollution to our waters. We should be fighting to clean up our waters, not adding more pollution.

The Gulf Coast's economy and culture are

infinitely connected to healthy waters and beaches and vibrant recreational and commercial fisheries that supply residents and visitors with great seafood. These industries are already facing serious challenges from pollution, natural disasters, and foreign competition. Factory fish farms make it more difficult for our hard working, small-boat fishermen to make a living while increasing corporate control over our seafood production.

The public is left with more questions than answers because the EPA has yet to explore the full implications of this proposed project by requiring an Environmental Impact Statement.

For all these reasons and more, EPA should stop Kampachi from using our region as a test tube for the first ever Gulf federal water offshore facility. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. If you're 24, please come to the site.

BRUCE WOJCIK: Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here tonight.

My name is Bruce Wojcik. I'm a retired wildlife biologist and ecologist, spent a major part of my career working with wetlands and

aquatic issues. And very familiar with the permit systems and even more familiar with how people get around them. And I'm not pointing an accusatory finger at any new company, but I'm just telling you that it does happen. Not only does that happen, accidents happen.

And I'm not going to -- I don't want to get into should we do aquaculture or not. For me, no. If I don't shoot it or catch it on the end of a line, I don't eat it. I don't want the man processing my food. So I do my own food procurement. But I do realize that aquaculture is important, but not here.

I spend an awful lot of time out on the water. Anybody here that spends more time on the water than me, I don't know how you're still married or have any friends because I am on the water constantly and mainly back country fishing. I live in Charlotte County and I fish all around Sanibel and Captiva and all throughout Charlotte Harbor. And if you do that and you do it three, four, five days a week, you know what red tide has done, you know the damage that's going on still.

And if you happen to subscribe to the FWC

website and you get the weekly, twice weekly report on red tide, you can go from Collier up to Pasco County and you never, never see anywhere that it doesn't have at least background concentration of the red tide. Background concentration of the red tide may be normal, but you don't want it to get any stronger than that and it will with more nutrients. It's not worth the risk to put that extra nutrient load out there.

Read your little handout. It says the permittee will develop BMPs. The fox guarding the henhouse? I'm going to write the best management practices that's going to close my business down?

There are way too many grey areas in this permit process. As a scientist, I oppose it; as a sportsman, I oppose it; as a human being living in this country on this planet, I oppose it. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. If you are number 25. You're 25?

ROBERT IVERSON: 24.

JAN CONNERY: We're at 23. That's all right. I'm glad we have a cue and I'm glad we have folks

waiting. You're doing really well.

TYLER VADEN. Hi. My name is Tyler Vaden, and I'm a Sarasota homeowner.

The Gulf of Mexico is at a breaking point. You don't have to look far back in the history books to recognize that. The Deepwater Horizons still, the red tide bloom, the ever-expanding dead zone. This water is tired and yet we continued to exploit it in the name of profit and consumption.

At what point do we realize that we are harming the ocean that we depend on. We need to appreciate the Gulf and start taking better care of it before it's too late. The EPA entertaining a company that isn't even from here to exploit our waters for their own financial gain is insulting.

It's inevitable that significant runoff will be created from this farm considering that a discharge permit is required. Antibiotics and nitrogen will be effectively dumped into a location that is already proven it cannot handle it.

By allowing this offshore farm to run, we will be paving the way for more to be built.

While one farm may not have significant impact, would ten? There needs to be more regulatory standards and studies on how this would affect the health of the ocean before it is green-lighted.

As a father to a little girl, I worry about the health of our oceans and I am fearful of what it will look like when she is my age. Overdevelopment, exploitation of the land, dated sewage systems and other sources of runoff already plague our state. It's disheartening enough to see what companies like Mosaic and the U.S. Sugar Corporation are getting away with. Are we really going to entertain bringing in another company -- (Interruption by audience applause.)

We should be directing our time and energy towards solutions that protect the water instead of looking for ways to profit off of it. It's time we stand up for an ocean that can't stand up for itself. There is very little to gain and much to lose by allowing this proposal to go through. Let's shut this horrific idea down. Florida has been through enough.

JAN CONNERY: Does anyone have number 22?

Okay. Well, then we'll do 24. He was 23.

ROBERT IVERSON: 24. My name is Robert Iverson. I'm a 20-year resident of Florida, retired physician.

First I have to say that I'm not an eco-fanatic. I eat farmed Salmon, farmed catfish, and tilapia. It's delicious. It's reasonably priced and it's widely available. When I can afford it, I even buy Mote Marine's farmed sturgeon caviar, and that's not very often.

However, I have to admit the fish farms are here to stay. Expansion of aquaculture industry I believe is good when properly managed and regulated, but please note the proposed Kampachi Fish Farm in the waters west of Sarasota will break the existing ban on fish farming in Gulf coastal waters. I wonder why it been banned up to now. Well, that's a rhetorical question.

But I think there's a notable lack of information about the harms of just such a project. It's being proposed as a pilot project. But I carefully reviewed the NPDES. I got lost in a lot of acronyms. All the supporting documents, over 500 pages, I read them word by

word. And it turns out, remember your biology doing experiments, this is the definition of a biological experiment. The outcome is unknown.

The design of this experiment contains a plethora of data pertaining to potential environmental risks and within the experiment the outcomes are unknown.

Just a brief passing comment. Since I'm a physician I'm, of course, concerned about dropping antibiotics into the ocean. The application I think, the summary application, indicated that Kampachi would not initially plan to use antibiotics, that if used they would be used in limited qualities. Well, that's reassuring. Meanwhile, we're being told we shouldn't flush our old unused antibiotics down the toilet because it all flows into the Gulf and disrupts the ecosystem. Go figure.

All right. On to my main point. One of the most important outcomes, this has been mentioned before, is the red tide risk. To get just a bit scientific, you've already heard that the growth of the organism requires nitrogen and phosphorous, the same ingredients in fertilizer and in fish food.

I have to -- is my time growing short?

JAN CONNERY: Half a minute.

ROBERT IVERSON: Then I'll go quickly.

About 30 percent of the fish food that's dropped into this net will be kept by the fish. 70 percent of it will be excreted in terms of in form of fish feces. And then there's a lot of the pellets that don't get eaten and go right down to the bottom. This all then contributes to the nitrogen and the phosphorous for our red tide organisms to proliferate with.

So we can't forget the impact of the red tide, the smell, the stench, the economic impact, of dead fish kill. Who would want to participate in this experiment?

The standards are not there. The measurements of the limit for the measurements for nitrogen and phosphorous don't exist in the EPA's guidelines because this is new, this is unprecedented territory, it's an experiment. There's no guidelines, there's no rules to break, this is just an experiment and we should not go there.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. We're up to 25 right now. If you are 28, please come up to

either side.

BILL MATTURRO: My name is Bill Matturro. I'm speaking on behalf of the Wildlife Law Center from the national organization Friends of Animals.

The EPA should deny this permit application for the simple reason that there currently is no statutory authority for permitting and developing aquaculture in federal waters, in waters that remain the property of the people of the United States. The Keep Finfish Free Act of 2019, which is House Bill 2467, would prohibit the issuance of permits by any agency to conduct finfish aquaculture until a law is enacted that allows such action.

EPA should accede to congressional authority and postpone any permitting until it is given the specific legal right to lease public waters to private interests. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 26. And if you're 29, it's a good time to come up.

ROBERT WEISBERG: Good evening. My name is Robert Weisberg. My professional title is Distinguished University Professor and I'm a professor of physical oceanography in the College

of Marine Science at USF.

What's really fascinating tonight is the different approaches that everybody is taking to this issue and I will give you yet another one.

I'm not here to advocate for or against the Kampachi Fish Farm. Instead, I am here to state that the documents provided, totaling some 500 pages, each with EPA, USACE, and other informators are useless for providing assurances that problems will not arise. Why? Because the ocean circulation determines the water properties in which the Kampachi Fish Farm will reside and the transfer of materials that may issue from it. Yet, the ocean circulation is either ignored or misrepresented in the documents.

Despite well-developed literature on the West Florida continental shelf circulation and its role in shelf ecology, the cited literature dates back to the 1970s when very little was known. Similarly, while a large data set now exists, only a snippet was presented and in a very misleading manner even without proper attribution. I mean, the reports were just sloppy. Thus, while the Environmental Assessment draft covers a lot of material, it fails to cover

what is important.

So what may be said of importance this evening. Under certain not uncommon conditions, materials issuing from the proposed fish farm can arrive on Captiva-Sanibel beaches within only a few days. You would never know that from reading the report. This was determined by tracking particles using a simulation and I will show you an example in a minute.

I will add that this near-bottom transfer pathway that I will show is the same way that the region receives its red tide in most years and is also why gag grouper juveniles tend to be so abundant between Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor. Given more time, I could provide a whole series of such simulations, but I'll have to stop with just a couple.

So you probably can't see this, but so there's the Kampachi site and within four days materials, under typical conditions, can arrive at Captiva and Sanibel. And the simulation was done for 2010. On the top you're seeing simulations made every month in that year. And so not only can they go to Captiva and Sanibel, they could also go to the Dry Tortugas around the

Keys also in a matter of days.

And so we've heard a lot of experts talk about what's in the report. The report is missing some really fundamental information and on the basis of that report we should not be granting any permit. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Robert, we have a book of the public commenters, if you will submit those.

So we are up to number 27.

We have two baskets just as a reminder, where you can leave a comment. And of course you can submit them, as Jeaneanne said earlier, after the meeting up through February 4th.

Please go ahead.

BROOKE ERRETT: Hello. My name is Brooke Errett. I'm a Florida organizer with Food & Water Watch and Food & Water Action, representing over 60,000 supporters here in Florida. We're here in opposition to the proposed permit.

Factory fish farming is big, dirty, and dangerous and like the factory farming that we see here on land. These farms are merely a result of attempts to produce fish as cheaply as possible. Allowing ocean fish farming in our waters grants private companies the right to

exploit our public resources for their own financial benefit.

This is bad for our ecosystem. Uneaten fish feed, fish waste, and any antibiotics or chemicals used in fish farm operations flow from the cages directly into the ocean and this can significantly harm the ocean environment. Caged fish escape and then they compete for resources or interbreed with wild fish and weaken important genetic traits.

Farmed fish also spread disease to wild fish. And especially in Florida these escapes are a given due to complications like severe weather, sharks and other predators, equipment failure, and human error. Fish escapes jeopardize the recovery of depleted or endangered species that we're already seeing here in the state and lead to the spread of diseases, breeding with the wild populations, and causing the disruption of natural ecosystems.

As someone else said, it's also bad for our economy. Factory fish farms interfere with the livelihoods of commercial and recreational fisherman by displacing them from traditional fishing grounds and harming the wild fish

population. It then floods the market with cheap farmed fish and drives down prices for our wild fish, putting fisherman out of business and fishing communities in peril.

Another economic concern is to our tourism industry as there's a decreased opportunity for recreational fishing as fish and water become polluted by nearby factory farms.

And it's bad for our health. Fish produced at factory fish farms have higher levels of contaminants than wild fish and they lead to health risks for consumers. The use of antibiotics on fish farms can cause drug-resistant bacteria to develop, which is then passed on to humans.

But most importantly, it's not necessary. Unfortunately, even though people have become increasingly cautious about the environmental cultural and economic repercussions of their seafood choices, the U.S. government continues to push for the development of open-ocean aquaculture. The federal government has already spent millions to promote this troubled industry despite overwhelming poor results.

The U.S. right now exports about 70 percent

of the fish we catch and then imports cheaper, lower quality seafood products for U.S. Consumption. Just because we keep producing more fish here doesn't mean those products would be eaten here or that we would import less fish. It is absolutely unnecessary and we ask you to deny this permit. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. We're at 28. 28 now. And if you have 30 or 31, I invite you to come up on either side at this point.

DR. NEAL SCHLEIFER: Hello. I'm Dr. Neal Schleifer. I'm president of Paradise Cove Association on Siesta and over 40-year resident. We oppose the granting of the pollutant discharge permit to Kampachi Farm.

The beaches, marine life, and ecosystem are why many of us chose to live here. They also fuel the local economy and tourism, the area's largest business.

All agree the fish farm will release untreated feces, antibiotics, and excess feed into the Gulf. This will increase ammonia nitrogen and decrease oxygen. This cannot be good for the health of the Gulf and natural species.

We're told the amount of the discharge will not be enough to create major problems. There are several fallacies for that reasoning. First, the Gulf ecosystem is much more fragile than previously thought. Red tide blooms have been much more frequent, intense than expected and may be affected by fish farm discharge. Algae blooms causing massive fish kills have increased in other countries that have fish farms, including Norway, Iceland, and others.

The public has been told not to worry and environmentalists dismissed as alarmists, but our concerns are too often proven valid. There are too many risks to ignore. No-swim advisories have been increasing at an alarming rate. Nokomis and North Jetty Beaches December 23rd to 25th, Blind Pass Beach in August, three other Sarasota beaches on July 4th, all prime time for locals and tourists.

Fish farms bring diseases to native fish. Contaminating the waters from two different antibiotics and other harmful chemicals won't stop the problem. It hasn't elsewhere.

Pens fail and release farm fish which compete with native fish. Whenever that happens, the

native fish population declines.

We're told that one farm will not impact us seriously, but no one knows for sure. Don't risk our life and livelihoods -- or quality of our life and livelihood on speculation.

Most importantly, it has been widely reported that this farm is only a test case. The proponents of ocean fish farms want this to be the precedent that opens the door to industrializing our waters. A number of farms are proposed for the Gulf alone already and that will surely lead to disaster. But, remember, even one farm has the potential for calamity.

Imagine a red tide outbreak with 20,000 fish in the pen. How would that affect the Gulf?

It's easy to say the cage will be lowered in a hurricane, but a pen with 20,000 fish and a category three, four, or five hurricane. Automation only needs more to go wrong. Anyone with experience knows how corrosive salt waters are. Imagine the potential catastrophe if a pen opens, breaks loose, or hits bottom.

There are too many dangers and unknowns because of the prevalence of red tide and hurricanes in Sarasota. We urge the EPA, don't

approve this contract, don't be remembered as the ones who opened the door to our greatest coastal and economic disaster. Don't make our home and ecosystem a test specimen for an unproven industry's gamble for profit.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 29. 29. And if you are 31 and 32, please come up on the sides.

STEWART DAVID: My name is Stewart David. I'm a full-time resident of Venice.

I feel like this is a bit of a scam perhaps because what could possibly be learned from this small test project. At this scale, it is unlikely that pollution will do enough damage to significantly harm the ecosystem, yet we know that factory farming of fish has repeatedly been shown to be an environmental nightmare. If larger projects are allowed because this tiny project is deemed successful, that will create massive levels of pollution.

Will the diseases and parasites, common occurrences in crowded pens, be spread to wild fish? How will the pesticides and antibiotics used to control these diseases and parasites impact local species and water quality? Most importantly, here in Sarasota County, will the

high level of excrement intensify future episodes of red tide? Will the cages themselves perhaps even become incubators for red tide? Who knows.

As an aside here, a Sarasota Herald Tribune article noted that, quote, the purpose of operations like this is to create a sustainable source of seafood. That is absolutely not true. The purpose is for a limited liability company to make millions of dollars. And the purpose is also for other stakeholders like Mote to make money too.

This factory farming, like all factory farming, is the antithesis of sustainability. When we raise animals for food we put many more calories of food into them than we get in return. Mostly what we get back is massive amounts of excrement. We don't need that in the Gulf.

Now, I'm not a scientist, but I do read what the scientists have to say. Many have spoken out against fish factory farming for some of the reasons I noted. Many also infer that the primary cause of red tide is excessive nutrients in the water. So why on earth would we add so much fish excrement to our water.

I know the folks at Mote disagree, but I

prefer to listen to the scientists who do not take money from the polluters and profits -- (Interruption by audience applause.) Not those who have their hands in the cookie jar.

So let's say no to fish factory farming. It's an especially bad idea here in the Gulf.

I live near the beach and I witnessed the incredible horrific devastation of red tide less than two years ago. We should be doing anything and everything we can to try and avoid its reoccurrence. This would be a giant step backwards. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Number 30. And do we have 31? Okay. And 32 and 33, I invite you to come up if you have those numbers.

CHRIS BALES: Hi. My name is Chris Bales, a Sarasota resident. Our family came here 60 years ago when Mote started their first research laboratory.

I'm upset with Mote. I'm sorry. After 35 years of research, the Mote red tide research, they have been researching it since 1984, they tell us we can do our part to prevent red tide. Pick up your dog waste. Huh.

Mote has been studying red tide since 1984,

but yet they beat around the bush to what feeds the blooms. They quote on their website, even though we don't know everything yet about how human activity relate to a red tide, Florida red tide that has moved ashore, we do know there's potential, potential, for coastal nutrients to influence the blooms. And we certainly know that excess nutrients and other kinds of pollution flowing into our coastal ecosystems are generally bad for those systems and should be reduced.

So why are they supporting a permit to add more nutrients to our ecosystem? In fact, it's really upsetting that on the big sugar website, of all places, most leading Florida expert is quoted regarding the causes of red tide because they're so noncommittal about those causes although they have been studying it since 1984.

Mote does further state that red tide develops 10 to 40 miles offshore, away from human-contributed nutrient sources, but now they are wanting to put those nutrient sources right where red tide starts. So, essentially, they are going to be making a sandwich of red tide that starts out 40 miles and in shore. It's very scary.

60 years of Mote Marine research and not to mention millions of dollars of grant money has not translated into safer water quality in Sarasota today and our marine life continues to decline. I thought having Mote here we would have the most pristine waters, that they would be the ones to sound the alarms to let us know we need to do this type of -- anyway. I forgot.

When does the research begin to translate to public benefit? Shame on you for supporting more pollution in our Gulf and risking our Sarasota public health. I ask you, Mote, to do your part. Pick up your fish farm waste and think about how your actions will negatively impact our marine environment. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 31. 32. Do we have anyone with 33? 34? Okay. And how about 35? Yes. Okay. Be a good time to come up then. Thanks.

MICHAEL MCGRATH: Hello and good evening. My name Mike McGrath, and I'm an organizer for the Florida chapter of the Sierra Club and I live on the water in Lee County.

Before the proceedings of today's public hearing, more than 30 concerned citizens gathered

around the common cause, checking our goal to ensure our waters remain free of excessive nutrient pollution. Today we have chanted, waved our signs about, and let the public know that industrial fish farms have got to go. To those who drove by our demonstration we sent a loud and clear message. Not here.

With the remaining time for my public comment, I'd like to raise some of the reasons we hold such urgent concerns around permit potentially being granted Kampachi Farms for the installation of industrial fish farms here in our Gulf.

Across the world, industrial fish farms have been linked to toxins such as untreated fish waste, excessive feed, agriculture drugs and pesticides, heavy metals, and other chemicals. The close quarters of these pens are incubators for disease and pests that can threaten wild fish stocks and other marine life, which also could further threaten sustainable commercial fishing operations, putting a blow to our local economy. They also threaten marine mammals, sea turtles, sharks, and seabirds and other wildlife with issues such as entanglement.

Finally, we all know about the outbreak of red tide and also its relation to excessive nutrient pollution. The release of fish food and waste becomes excessive nutrient pollution that will only further fuel algal blooms and also red tide outbreaks along our Gulf shores.

Other science points to the fact that aquaculture can be done right. How about we challenge that with some questions to consider further. How will Kampachi account for hurricanes that rip through our coast and ensure they don't contaminate our waters when they break the pens? What precedent also will this set in other permits if Kampachi is allowed to proceed with this installation? How do we let them not open up our Gulf coast to further fish farming operations that are industrial and often contribute to excessive nutrient pollution?

Industrial fish farms are not meeting our seafood demands. Our government should be building more support for standard seafood permit that does not pollute our oceans.

Industrial fish farming installations such as Kampachi Farms only further distress the balance of our ocean ecosystem, negatively impact the

public health, threaten our local economy and way of life. We need to deny the permit from Kampachi Farms. Thank you very much.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Last call for number 32 if you have that. Seeing no takers, we'll go to 33.

SHARON DROSICK (phonetic): Good evening. My name is Sharon Drosick. I'm a resident and a small business owner in Sarasota. I'm against the fish farm project.

We are facing a critical time. The planet and the Gulf needs our attention. Our action will have a direct impact on both. Marine aquaculture isn't the answer. Marine aq. will cause a continued strain on our troubled waters.

While fish is nutrient dense loaded with beneficial vitamins, these factory farm fish won't be the same quality. Fish raised on GMO grains will continue to contribute to our health epidemic. Look at the state of factory farms. Sick animals create a sick population.

Our water is life. We have a responsibility and an obligation to care for this body of water. A fish farm will add to a toxic algae bloom and a chemical garden on the Gulf.

Let's look for solutions to heal the water, to rebuild fish population. Currently we are destroying the waters, killing fish with each algae bloom.

A factory fish farm is a short-sighted Band-Aid to a bigger problem. We should look to the root cause and start to rebuild there. This project is environmentally irresponsible. Please deny this permit.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 34. And do we have 35? Do we have 35? You're 35. And 36?

RACHAEL CURRAN: I'm 33.

JAN CONNERY: Oh, you're 33. I missed you. You will go next.

PAUL ZAJICEK: So good evening. I'm Paul Zajicek. I'm the executive director of the National Aquaculture Association.

We're a nonprofit trade group made up of farmers that grow what you're concerned about today. There's about 3,000 farms in the United States. We grow a wide variety of fish, different invertebrates, reptiles, crustaceans, shrimp, these sorts of things in all kinds of locations including net pens.

So net pens in the United States are really

not a new idea. The Hawaiian farms that have been mentioned have been active since 1999. There have been net pens in the in-shore waters of Maine and the states -- the states of Maine and Washington since the 1970s. These are regulated by both the federal agencies that you see here today and the state agencies. They have been doing a darn good job producing fish and seafood that you enjoy.

So aquaculture is considered, under the Clean Water Act, a nonpoint source, so we fall into industrial waste category and you're discussing the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit and the 500 pages the agency has put together. I would really encourage you to read those documents. They're pretty well done.

This is a small farm. 88,000 fish in the Gulf of Mexico. I mean, you have to think about it, would fish feces really show up on your beaches from 45 miles out at sea. Highly unlikely when you think of all the wild fish out there that are doing the very same thing.

So I think you want to think about this and realize that these guys, Kampachi Farms, the Florida Sea Grant people, have really put

themselves out there to receive these comments, to hear from you, and to improve what they're doing. We have benefited from 40 some years of net pen production in the United States to be at the place we are now. You're concerned about the location, different kinds of issues. The agencies are here to listen and see if they can be mitigated.

There was a fishery management plan for marine aquaculture in the Gulf for several years. It wasn't acted on because it was litigated. Associated with that fishery management was an Environmental Impact Statement, so that's available for your review and read it.

We, as a society, we don't operate in a vacuum. Right now in China there's an African Swine Fever that's killed more than half of the pork that's there. This is going to completely upset the protein balance in the world.

We import proteins. We never used to do this before. If we're going to be a country that's self-sufficient, has quality products, do we want to import those or do we want to look at these regulations and say, can we do this and can we do this right. The history so far is yes, we can.

So be open minded. Think about this. Look at the documents.

We have a website, the National Aquaculture Association. There's an e-mail there. E-mail me questions. I would be happy to respond. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: 32. 33. We got a little mixed up there, but that's okay. We'll take you right now.

RACHAEL CURRAN: My name is Rachael Curran, and I'm a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity here in Florida. We are an endangered species advocacy group dedicated to securing a future for all species large and small and their habitats.

We oppose this project and would like to, first and foremost, point out EPA's unlawful Environmental Review culminating in an inadequate draft Environmental Assessment and preliminary FONSI. EPA must evaluate cumulative and direct impacts of this pilot project together with the full and true extent of all full-scale aquaculture projects planned to follow.

We know red tide starts offshore and reaches higher concentrations in nutrient-laden water

near shore. What is the impact of a red tide bloom starts offshore, approaches near-shore nutrient-laden waters, and it is also fed from behind by this net pen aquaculture creation?

There are over 20 listed species and the Environmental Assessment merely lists them without any detailed analysis of the impacts of this type of operation. We are particularly concerned about the Northwest Atlantic extinct populations like loggerhead sea turtles.

There has also been no adequate analysis of the public health impacts of not only the environmental harms caused by this operation, but of the public health impact of consuming the fish produced.

We'd also like to point out that there has been no in-depth climate change analysis, not on the project's impact on climate change itself, but on the climate change's impact on that project. As oceans warm, as red tide increases as a result of those oceans warming, that draft EA doesn't even mention it. These are failures that are challengeable through a court and we would like to remind the EPA of that.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you.

VICTORIA SHEA: Good evening. My name is Victoria Shea, and I'm a law clerk with the Center for Biological Diversity.

I was born and raised here in Sarasota. I grew up on our world-renowned beaches and I want to continue to enjoy them.

This issue before us is unprecedented as it enters the novel frontier of factory fish farming in federal waters. If approved, this factory farm would discharge untreated waste, chemicals, and antibiotics which have the potential to directly impact the health of our coastal community. Because it could pose a risk to human health and the environment, I strongly oppose allowing factory fish farming to invade our coast.

First, the proposed facility may pose hazardous risks to the public health. The highly concentrated use of antibiotics on factory fish farms can cause drug resistant bacteria to develop, which has the potential to impact humans by contributing to the public health crisis of antibiotic resistance. Also, fish produced in factory farms face exposure to higher levels of contaminants in wild fish. This may be lead to

health risks for consumers.

Second, the impacts to the environment would be detrimental. I have not forgotten the reality of the 2018 red tide, one of the worst in our state's history. Introducing this large amount of pollutants to our coast has the potential to exacerbate red tide. Why would we allow anything to make red tide worse than it already is.

Also we must consider the internationally recognized dire rate of destruction of Florida's barrier reef. Given the proximity of the reef to the pollution of this factory farm, we must protect this fragile ecosystem from the corporate greed of factory farming.

It is unclear to me why the agencies who are responsible for protecting our oceans are supporting and expanding this outdated and unnecessary industry, especially in light of the ecological, social, and economic problems associated with these operations.

And for these reasons, I request that the EPA deny this permit.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Are you number 36, sir?

JOHN MERLINO: I am number 36.

JAN CONNERY: Okay. That's very good. Do we have 37? 37 right over there. Oh, good.

38? We do. Okay. Probably in a good place right there.

39? Do we have 39? Okay. I'm not seeing a 39.

How about a 40? Oh, good. Okay. Thank you. Go right ahead.

JOHN MERLINO: Good evening. My name is John Merlino. I'm a local Sarasota County resident.

I have one question for the EPA tonight. Why? Why here in the Gulf? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea in a location already suffering repeated extended and devastating harmful algae blooms? Why here? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea in a location already experiencing an extreme population explosion? A population explosion occurring so rapidly that municipal sewage infrastructure is not able to keep up. How many millions of gallons of nutrient-rich sewage are dumped into local waters annually? I'm pretty sure the EPA knows the answer to that question because it all gets filed with them. Why here? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea in a location already experiencing annual deluge of nutrient-rich agricultural runoff? Billions of gallons of nutrient-rich water enter the Gulf annually via the Mississippi River and Lake Okeechobee watersheds. Industrial aquaculture is one of the biggest contributors to nutrient overload in our waters. I fail to see how industrial fish farming will not add to an already devastating problem. Again I would say, why here? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea in a location already experiencing an annual deluge of nutrient-rich runoff related to phosphate mining? Each day Mosaic Phosphate has permits from the EPA to pull upwards of 60 million gallons of clean water from our aquifer, our aquifer, not the federal government's, Florida's, to dilute their toxic wastewater and send it to the Gulf. Again I will ask, why here? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea in such a shallow body of water? Gulf of Mexico is not an ocean. It's not the Atlantic, it's not the Pacific. The Gulf lacks the depth and the flow to properly flush and dilute nutrient waste.

Repeated harmful blooms should be evidence enough to prove this. Again I would say, why here? Why now?

Why would this be a good idea considering the frequency of large hurricane activity in the Gulf? How can industrial fish farming guarantee us that storms will not cause harmful releases? To date, all other forms of industrial agriculture have failed to succeed with containment in extreme weather. You just have to look at the experience with hog farms in North Carolina in the most recent hurricanes. Devastating.

I will close by saying that I fail to see how allowing industrial fish farming in Gulf waters will do anything but add to the issues I've already stated. Fish farming is proven to add nutrients to the water and introduce illness and poor genetics to local species. Nothing good could come of this venture for the Gulf ecosystem.

This is solely a for-profit venture. The million dollar question is who profits? Not the residents of Florida, not the Gulf ecosystem. Who profits? Not all the people in the room

tonight that I'm hearing say, no, we don't want this. Who profits?

Again I will say, why here? Why now? The answer should be never here and never ever. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: 37.

SAMANTHA GENTRUP: Good evening. My name is Samantha Gentrup. I'm a teacher, I'm a homeowner in Sarasota County, and I'm also the president of a local environmental nonprofit called Hands Along the Water.

I'm here tonight to remind us that the decisions made here will most impact the every-day people, the residents, the small business owners, the parents, grandparents, and children in this community, not the large corporations or the organizations that these corporations fund. To open fish farms off our coast would be done so by ignoring facts as well as the clear will of the people.

The facts. In 2018 the ecological disaster that crossed Southwest Florida with devastating red tide killed over 900 sea turtles, over 500 Manatees, multiple whale sharks, dozens of dolphins and marine birds, and millions of fish

and crabs. And these are just the animals that we know of.

Hotels were operating at less than 20 percent occupancy. Our economy lost millions. And small family businesses that had been operating for generations went out of business. After all of this loss it's the tax payers, the every-day people of Florida, that bailed out our state as our tax money was used to supplement the economy instead of being used to fully fund programs such as Florida Forever as voters overwhelmingly asked for at the polls.

But what about the phrase pushed out by certain organizations, red tide is natural? Well, yes, it's naturally occurring, but so is E. coli. The problem is we're feeding it steroids in the form of nutrient pollution. These nutrients have been building up for decades along our coast with evidence provided near the water outlets.

I spend this time recapping so you can see how important this decision is. The last thing we need is fish farms producing more nutrient pollution, spreading diseases, leaking antibiotics and GMO materials into our already

damaged ecosystems.

A gentleman earlier mentioned swine flu. He mentioned this as an excuse for us to have fish farms here in the United States of America. Swine flu originated from raising animals in confined conditions. How ironic that he brings this up -- (Interruption by audience applause.)

The only reason to vote for this is to benefit the huge corporations on the backs of the very people that have built this community generation after generation. Up to the point I got up here, 30 people had spoken against this with six speaking for this and most of the six have financial interest in these offshore fish farms. We outnumber them five to one. Please let the record show that.

Look around this room. You cannot turn a blind eye and pretend not to see the will of the people that is so clearly visible here tonight. Will greed win out over the wellbeing of the every-day people of Southwest Florida? Will profit be placed again above planet or will the side of reason be chosen?

Look these people in the eyes. They know how the ecosystem equal a healthy economy. The

question is does the EPA?

As a member of this community, in unity with almost a dozen environmental organizations here tonight, I am asking that offshore fish farms be voted down and the application be denied. Thank you very much.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Thank you. Number 38.

ANTHONY MCCHESNEY: Hi. My name is Anthony McChesney, and I am also a board member of the local environmental group here, Hands Along the Water.

I have lived here in Sarasota County for over 40 years. I continue to engage in many water-related activities such as scuba diving, surfing, fishing, boating, et cetera. I have seen the quality of these activities degrade over the years, especially in the last few years, all due to overdevelopment and excessive nutrients going into our waters.

Now Kampachi Farms wants to set up shop to do business that will also contribute to unnecessary nutrients and toxins directly going into our waters without any way of filtering these out. So now we will have an onslaught of harmful

nutrients coming from land and now directly into our Gulf.

Yes, this current project is just the beginning of many more if it gets the green light to move forward. We in the State of Florida will pay the price of further degradation of our waters and the wildlife that lives in and around it.

I wrote a letter of opposition to Kampachi Farms a couple of months ago when I first heard of this. In the letter from your response you stated that you are working towards solutions that have been shown to offer great potential and that your concern for ocean welfare is what drives you in your work.

I now would like to address the elephant in the room concerning our increased degradation of our waters not only locally, but globally. And that is the mindset that we humans must use our precious land, use toxic chemicals, use clean water and other natural resources for corporate animal meat consumption. And, yes, that includes fish farms.

The feed that is commonly used to feed farmed fish is soy and corn, just like the rest of our

corporate farm-raised animals. The most detrimental crops that are grown on millions of acres and that destroys our environment from nutrients and poisonous chemicals is soy and corn. Not for us to eat, but to feed it to our farm-raised meat corporations.

If we the people truly care and want to make a significant improvements for our environment, then stop eating meats. Stop supporting these destructive corporate practices. We humans do not need to eat the meat of any type of animal flesh to lead a happy, healthy life.

Our Gulf of Mexico has the largest dead zone in the world where the Mississippi River dumps into it. The feed that is grown in these meat production farms are mostly based along rivers and streams that feed into the Mississippi River.

Kampachi Farms, if you are truly concerned for our oceans' welfare and you truly want to make a positive environmental impact on feeding us, then study and build an organic land plant-based farm to grow everything we need, whereas you can control the filtration of excessive nutrients. This mentality is the future. It is our hope for a cleaner planet and

is catching on rapidly. Why not join in on what's really good for us and our planet.

To the EPA, I strongly oppose this permit. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: I believe we did not have a 39, but I will ask it -- oh, you're 39. Oh, you're 38? Okay.

SUE ANN LEVIN: Sue Ann Levin, resident Siesta Key.

Upon hearing everything that I heard tonight, I'm appalled and outraged because the people that came to support this farm, it seems like to them it's a done deal.

EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, what are we protected from? If a private individual did their job the way the EPA did their job, we wouldn't have a job.

We have red tide almost every year. They talk about it, they do nothing to stop it. They don't stop the phosphates, they don't stop the sugar industry. What is their role if not to protect us?

And yet, here they are trying to bring a fish farm on board, not thinking about the people, they're thinking about business and big business

at that. And if it is successful they will open up more of these fish farms and we will destroy the Gulf. And then what will the EPA do? Not much because every time there's a big storm they throw tons of sewage into the Gulf of Mexico because we do not have adequate facilities for the growing population of Sarasota.

And I often wonder, how can the EPA let them build all these buildings when they can't take care of the sewage. That's what your job is.

Don't allow this fish farm. Please. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 40. And 41.

CAYMAN MOSELEY: I'm number 39.

JAN CONNERY: 39. I'm sorry. We seem to have gotten our --

CAYMAN MOSELEY: Hello. My name is Cayman Moseley, and I'm a 17-year-old clean water activist.

I stand for the youth of Florida that loves to enjoy the Gulf waters each and every single day. And I just wanted to say, if you guys can't tell me this little experiment of yours is not going to affect mine, my little brother's future, and the rest of the youth of Florida, then why

even do it?

This is where I and many other youth enjoy surfing, swimming, skim boarding, fishing, and a variety of other things. This is my future, my brother's future, and all the youth of Florida's future, and it's a place I love.

So my advice to you guys is that the risk really does drastically outweigh the benefits at hand here. So not here, not now, and not ever. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 40.

MARGARET JEAN CANNON: That was an excellent speech, so thank you.

Okay. My name is Margaret Jean Cannon and I'm Siesta Key Association. I'm also a vice president with Tiffany Sands Condo Association.

And basically what I'm looking at is where's the baseline. You talked about doing some baseline measurements of the current water or ongoing water quality. I would like to see baseline measurements done out in the circles. And I would like to see those base measurements go in some areas that would get close to the shore.

Who will actually be monitoring this? My

understanding, it's going to be the people in the fish farm. Well, that's not independent monitoring. I would like to see any kind of monitoring and testing, if this done, to be done so the public can see it and see what's going on.

Where is the baseline for the migrating species? We have hammerhead sharks that go up and down our coast. We have our turtles that are in migration. We also have other kinds of fish that are in danger. What are the baselines for the migrating species and the species in that particular area and who is going to be monitoring this and making sure that they are not being impacted?

We recognize that those fish will be around that fish farm and will be eating that grain that's falling off as well as attacking. So there could be even these animals that are being caught up in the nets.

And while the current movements are supposedly not strong, we do know that there is currents, as someone had mentioned earlier, which bring the water into our shores. So whether it's strong or not, we are going to get it into our shores.

The other thing we have is we have the movement of the water as the storms stir it up and it also stirs up the bottom and brings all that's on the bottom back up into that current and comes into our shores. So I really have concerns about that.

The marine ecosystem can also entangle other fish and can attract other bait fish to those cages. The other thing you see is that this is a test. So what's the plan for doing it larger? This is the concern we have, is that one test leads to very large.

What we have today, we have onshore fish farms that do an excellent job and when they use the -- agriculture uses the by-products to be fertilizer and the fish get to be able -- why can't we expand that? Mote did an excellent job with the sturgeon and I really enjoyed the caviar while it lasted.

I also want to say, what's the impact on our commercial fisherman? What about our sports fisherman?

You know, when I walk the beach every single solitary day, you should see my pictures, I can't stop taking them, but my concern is that I'm in

the water all the time. And I don't worry about if I've got a cut on myself, I'm in that water. So what happens when we start getting these kinds of nutrients into our shore and antibiotics? And they will happen.

I want to say also that the -- there is one thing I wanted to say that. Okay. Sorry. One more thing. I lost it.

I thank you very much everybody for listening.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. So do we have a 42? Are you 42? And 43?

ROSANNA MARIE NEIL: 43.

JAN CONNERY: 42 and 43. Okay.

HALLIE TEMPLETON: I'm 45.

JAN CONNERY: You're 45?

HALLIE TEMPLETON: I'm 46. Sorry.

JAN CONNERY: 46. Do we have a 44? Okay. Good. All right. Thanks.

JANE ARMSTRONG: My name is Jane Armstrong. I live in Venice. I was born in 1951.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: You can take the mic out of the holder. It will be more comfortable for you. There you go.

JANE ARMSTRONG: I've been here a lot. I was

born in Tampa and I grew up in Bradenton. And I remember red tide when I was a kid. It would last about two weeks, three weeks, maybe and it was gone.

What we experienced two years ago was off the bloody chart. It was off the charts. We know and have known for many years that nutrient overloading is a significant issue.

I remember hearing years ago that red tide starts offshore. What nobody has mentioned here is that the center of the state is phosphate-enriched land. Mosaic is here because of that.

The phosphate goes down into the aquifer periodically with the ebb and flow of water cycle and doesn't stop at the shoreline, folks. It goes out offshore. Is that where these initial blooms are happening? I have yet to hear anybody say that that's not what's going on.

I guess what I'm here to say is that clearly we have way too much nutrient overload going on and adding anything to this perfect storm that we're right on the precipice of is a bad idea. That said, the same company does work where they cultivate bivalves. I was a freshwater biology

person long ago and far away. Bivalves clean the water. Why aren't we talking about that?

They don't have to be fed anything. They're filter feeders. Could we consider that?

Using this proposal as a way to boost our economy and our revenue and create a food supply, it goes without argument, this is not the best way to do it.

My son, who never graduated from high school because he's one of those outside of the box kids, created an aquaponics system in our house right now. We're not eating the koi because they're now our pets, but we're eating the heck out of kale and lettuce and beets and all kinds of neat stuff that comes from that system.

We have evolved a way a living on this planet that is power over and we've broken it. We have got to move forward by learning how to live with and do a power with. That's where everybody wins and that's where the environment wins as well. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. I believe we're at 42.

HALLIE TEMPLETON: I'm 46. I'm sorry.

JAN CONNERY: Do we have 42 here? Nobody's

42. What about 43? 43. Please go ahead.

ROSANNA MARIE NEIL: Good evening. My name is Rosanna Marie Neil, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, NAMA, which is a proud member of the Don't Cage Our Ocean Coalition.

Our organization and many of the fisherman in our network are strongly opposed to the Velella Epsilon project for multiple reasons. First of all, it's morally wrong to allow a corporation to enclose and control an area of the ocean, essentially converting a public resource to private property. This dangerous trend has already played out on land and has led to a few agribusinesses controlling the majority of farm land. The last thing that we need is for the ocean to become occupied and burdened by corporate-owned factory fish farms.

Secondly, the ocean is the home of wild fish. Introducing vast amounts of farmed finfish in cages would likely ruin the ecosystem, not to mention the beauty, richness and wonder of the ocean that draws people from near and far to this area.

Fish farms are known to cause declines in

wild fish populations from the use of forage fish and fishmeal and other direct impacts, including discharge of waste, chemical pollution, and possible fish escapes. No amount of technology can defy the laws of nature in thermodynamics, period.

Thirdly, this project will be a burden on coastal communities in Florida and local industries like tourism and fishing. This is a classic example of a project that would benefit one company at the expense of the public. Reducing reliance on imported seafood is not a valid justification for contaminating our ocean with offshore fish farms.

Approximately 84 percent of domestic wild caught seafood is exported and processed overseas and a significant portion is reimported to the U.S. To lower our carbon footprint, we should be focused on replenishing wild fish populations, investing in sustainable and diverse fishing fleets, and supporting domestic seafood processing facilities and markets.

In conclusion, we urge the EPA to deny the permit for this ill-advised project. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thanks. So do we have 44?

You're 44. Good.

JANET FENNESSY: Hello. My name is Jan Fennessy. I'm an advocate of the Clean Water Tribe.

JAN CONNERY: Just step up a little closer.

JANET FENNESSY: I'm usually on crutches, so I'm winging it tonight.

My name is Jan Fennessy. I'm an advocate of the Clean Water Tribe, and I own a home near Manasota Beach.

What I would like to do is talk about the fish farming, the aquaculture, the problems and concerns. The following is a list of concerns.

Can you hear me?

JAN CONNERY: Yes.

JANET FENNESSY: The following is a list of concerns associated with the proposed aquaculture project. Following this brief narrative, your commentary concerning the information presented will be greatly appreciated.

Number one. Pollution. The density of fish within a given pen will generate a given area/concentration of effluence/waste, which will then move with the currents that exists within the Gulf of Mexico, having a potentially negative

effect on the environment downstream.

Two. To what extent will the use of antibiotics, vaccines, disinfectants be used? Also, what substances will be used to prevent corrosion of equipment and what collective effect will that have on the environment immediate and downstream?

Three. Given an ever-increasing frequency and intensity of toxic algae blooms, commonly known as red tide outbreaks, within the Gulf of Mexico, along with a projected increase in the average October, November water temperature, an aquaculture project such as proposed appear to be somewhat high in the risk development with respect to a protracted fish die-off.

Four. Please speak to the word prototype fish farm. Should this proposed fish farm aquaculture project maintain feasibility, what will be the limits in terms of its potential for expansion? Are there already preset goals and perimeters in place or is that aspect of the proposed fish farm somewhat empirical?

Last but not least, within the scientific community, what sources of knowledge, research, and expertise will you be consulting with as the

proposed aquaculture project moves forward? And in terms of objectivity, where will their funding be derived from?

And I definitely do not agree with this aquaculture coming into Sarasota County. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: We're up to 45. Finally. And 46, 47. Do we have a 48? Oh, perfect. Thank you.

JODANNA OSCEOLA: Thank you. This wait has been about as long as this pregnancy.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mote, and the EPA, thank you for taking your time to listen to all of us and our cares and concerns for and against.

As a mother and long-term resident, water protector --

JEANEANNE GETTLE: Excuse me. Can you give us your name.

JODANNA OSCEOLA: Oh, I apologize. Jodanna Osceola.

As a mother and long-term resident of Sarasota County, a water protector, I stand here to speak and strongly oppose the permit as it stands for the Epsilon project in the Gulf of Mexico. Our Gulf is not for sale. The EPA

should be listening to the voters and protect the residents who live here and do not want it here.

I'm also a mother. As you can tell, this is baby number three on the way. I love our Gulf. I have taught numerous children to swim in it. I can't wait to teach this one too.

I'm the mother and wife to a Florida Native American family. We routinely drive between the Everglades and Sarasota County and I've seen firsthand the damage in nature from there to here by what is already allowed under the statutes from the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers and their discharge. I have seen what happens to nature as Lake O. opens and two weeks later we have the worst red tide outbreak in the last 20 years that I've lived here.

My brothers, as firefighters, had to clean up our beaches. Over 2 million pounds, I believe, as firefighters with masks on. As a mother, I dealt with respiratory things. We all lived here. We all know what happens with red tide.

But I digress. I'm not asking that it doesn't happen. I am asking that it does not happen the way it is stated. I am asking that the permit is not given where it is requested.

I'm asking that the EPA and residents of Sarasota County and Mote become more responsible stewards in our approach to both clean up our Gulf with a proven method of fish farming and sustainable resources before we put it in the Gulf of Mexico. Our Gulf is not, at the time, ready to handle an experiment of this size.

Man does not know better than nature. And first we have to clean up the Gulf so that the fish can come back. We need to keep the experiment out of the Gulf.

Most aqua farm is wonderful. I'm a big fan of the caviar project.

Kampachi and Mote both need to search out different locations and one unmanned pen that is visible by a robot once a week to refill the food in a shallow depth in warm water where the cage has not been tested in those temperatures is not adequate. Our residents have seen it. The fish food is not acceptable because it's a soy based.

In conclusion, the blue-green algae combined with red tide nutrients, antibiotics, and the flesh eating bacteria with the Lake O. discharge are all a recipe for disaster killing our beaches and towards living in Florida and life in

Florida. Thank you for your time. And I apologize for the stumbles.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. 46.

HALLIE TEMPLETON: Hi. My name Hallie Templeton. I'm with Friends of the Earth. We have 2.3 million members and activists across the United States, including 80,000 here in Florida, and I'm here on behalf of all of them.

First I want to point out that we did file public comments back in September when this plan was first proposed and there was not a public hearing on the book yet and the extension of the commenting period hadn't happened yet, so we only had 30 days to weigh in.

So first I want to thank EPA for listening to public outcry and scheduling this hearing and listening to everybody. And to continue to be -- EPA to continue listening to the public outcry. We've had many more opposed than we have had supportive here tonight. So we appreciate you listening and please continue to listen.

So first I want to point out that we oppose the plan as it is. EPA's Environmental Assessment and biological opinion for the permit violate the National Environmental Policy Act and

the Endangered Species Act. They don't go far enough. They don't fully analyze the risks that are mandated by law.

We worked with Center for Biological Diversity and the public comments we already filed and we're going to elaborate those and file more at the end of the commenting period just before February. Everybody should file comments by then if you're for or against.

Second I want to talk about the risks a little bit more. A lot of these have been touched on, but so we can get something in the public record. I'm sorry if it's too repetitive.

But confining farming animals, whether you're on the land or in the water, is a problem. There's an increased risk when you cultivate species and confine them. There is risk for workers in surrounding environment and communities and the ecosystem.

There's biohazards like disease and parasites on land or in the water. These require pharmaceuticals and other chemical compounds. When you farm tens of thousands of animals, as is proposed for this experiment, they require feeding massive amounts and this produces massive

amounts of waste. When you place these operations in open water the risks are exacerbated.

Containment devices use heavy metals not meant for water like copper, which reaches into the environment and into water -- and it impacts water quality. They also use antifoulants to protect against marine environments. This reaches into the water as well. We've heard about antifoulants. These will increase the red tide.

Fish escapes are commonplace in the industry. Fish escapes happen all the time and often times the entire brood stock within the net pen. And these escapes can have a huge impact on the wild stocks here in the Gulf. And there are also marine mammals, seabirds, and other predatory entanglements that are at risk.

These concerns barely scratch the surface. There is a reason you have heard from so many who are opposed to the farm. It may be a pilot project, but it has the intention of seeking commercial development in the Gulf of Mexico and across the United States.

EPA has acknowledged that you're planning to

use the project to streamline permitting for commercial operations. We're opposed to that. We're opposed to the plan to commercially permit this industry, especially when other countries like Canada and Denmark have begun to phase it out.

There's negative consequences and negative experiences that we must learn from and the United States is currently a leader because we don't have these things in our water in federal-controlled waterways. So we should keep it that way and we urge you to please vote -- or please deny the permit. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Do we have 48, somebody who is 48? Okay. 49. Good. And how about 50? Excellent. All right. We'll be taking you guys next.

JESSIKA ARMAN: Good evening. My name is Jessika Armman and my parents brought me here when I was 18 months old in 1971. I'm 50. I've lived the majority of my years on this planet here in Sarasota County.

I've watched with my own eyes what's happened here. I don't need to read a book to see the degradation. 2018 we had a red tide that

stretched all the way down from the Ten Thousand Islands area all the way up to the Pan Handle.

And I just want to say this. I didn't prepare anything today because, you know, God gave us two ears and two eyes to watch and listen, so I'm sorry that I'm kind of off the cuff here.

But I have sent my child to camp here at Mote and I've supported this organization, but today that ends for me. You have a really bad perception as reality problem, Mote. You're holding an EPA hearing with a company that you're going to go in business with. In the real world, that's called a conflict of interest. Number one. Okay.

Number two, I would love to give you a warm Floridian aloha to this Hawaiian company, but unfortunately I can't unless Mote has somehow figured out to raise fingerlings that are red tide resistant. Ha. I just have to laugh. It's ridiculous.

Your fish are going to die out there. And maybe the government has some backroom deal where they will help replenish them and pay more. Because guess what, Mote, people think you're a

quasi-governmental agency now with all the money that you're getting. You have a big reality perception problem.

I would like to lastly say that I just can't believe this, that this is happening. I'm very proud of all the people that showed up here tonight. Okay? And I hope that there will be some legal action taken.

I urge you, having also worked briefly in the government and I will not read the 500 page report that the gentleman asked us to. Rather, I'll ask you to read chapters 14, 15, and 16 of the book called The Gulf, which is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel. And it discusses about all the industrial pollution on our five Gulf states.

We're the only ones that don't have oil rigs off of our Gulf, but they want them. They want them. That's why the EPA just reduced -- you know, the Clean Water Act got rolled back. They're all in cahoots.

I have a friend who used to work at this organization who tested fish after the Deepwater Horizons, to this day still does it, there is oil in all the livers of these fish, every single one of them that she's tested.

So good luck with this fish farm. I'm so opposed to it I'm shaking up here. I'm sorry.

But the government and companies have a big tendency to take the same plan and reinstall it somewhere, you know, like El Salvador and then the Bay of Pigs. Well, it didn't work very well in Cuba. So the point is, when they take plans and reinstall them somewhere, you guys don't know the Gulf. This is something called a continental shelf. You can go out like miles upon miles and it's not very deep.

The water, yes, the Gulf is the biggest Gulf in the world, I don't know if people knew that, but the water circulation doesn't go around.

Anyway, I strongly oppose this and I wish the EPA would finally listen to the people because people think you are the environmental pollution agency these days.

JAN CONNERY: Number 48.

DORIN SUAREZ (phonetic): Good evening, everybody. My name is Dorin Suarez. I'm a resident, but I'm also an aquaculturist. I'm a little afraid here.

I'm here to read a letter in support of this project from my good friend and world authority,

Dr. Dan Benetti, a professor and director of aquaculture at the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science. I have no relation to Kampachi Farms other than I know them.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization has reported that more than 70 percent of the world's fish species are overfished. There's no more fish to go around even if we go out and fish for it.

Human population continues to grow and wild fisheries are collapsing as most stocks are being depleted. Where are we going to get food from? We need aquaculture. We need the information from these projects.

The world is responding. Aquaculture is currently already responsible for more than 50 percent of the fish and shellfish put on people's dinner tables around the world. The offshore areas of the United States have huge potential to develop an environmentally-sustainable offshore aquaculture industry.

We still have the opportunity to become the world's leader in sustainable aquaculture production. However, we are currently at risk of

losing our very important technological advances to other countries that already see valuable economic opportunities available in their waters. Several of these countries are already doing it while we're importing 80 percent or more of the food we consume.

Dr. Benetti then goes on into his credentials, which I don't have time to read but, believe me, he's published hundreds of papers, participated in numerous governmental and international panels, and worked with environmental NGOs, including the World Wildlife Fund and Mote Marine Aquarium, in cases of sustainability.

He goes on to say now is the time to let some of the best technologies developed in America be applied here at home. We have collectively developed technology to produce high-quality marine fish in ecologically-sustainable ways all the way to market with no significant or communicable impact on the environment. More importantly, we have been and continue conducting research addressing and resolving the environmental concerns necessary to responsibly develop offshore aquaculture in this country.

Proposed data have shown that ocean aquaculture is the right path to develop a low impact high industry that will produce much needed seafood while creating jobs and other socioeconomic benefits. Implementation of these activities in the U.S. will allow entrepreneurs to compete in an industry that is poised to continue to grow at almost 10 percent per year and is already being conducted in many foreign countries. It will promote the -- I'm almost done -- the growth of an economically viable socially responsible and environmentally-sustainable aquaculture.

Beyond economics, the importance of developing the offshore aquaculture industry in the U.S. is a matter of national security. We must act now to keep offshore aquaculture within U.S. waters to secure our autonomy in seafood supply. The Kampachi Farms realize the proposed initiative is an important step towards this crucial goal. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Number 49?

SANDRA VANSUCH: Hello. My name is Sandra VanSuch and I'm a Sarasota resident. I'm a parent and a small business owner.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. There have been so many brilliant speakers here before me. Most have discussed what I was here to say. I'm not a Toastmaster or a public speaker.

I'm not comfortable talking, but we are at a time when we have to step out of our comfort zones. I speak for many parents and hard-working residents who asked me to talk for them because they could not be here.

I feel on overload with so many battles that need fought. But if we do not have clean air and water we do not have life. And our waters are suffering. Our waters have no voice, we must be it.

I'm terrified for the world that we are passing on to our children. It used to be our grandchildren I was worried about, but things are getting bad at an alarming rate. The government is doing a great job regulating all the other areas of pollution in our country, aren't they?

This is an emotional topic for many of us. Please show me your hand if you were here when we had dead dolphins, dead manatees, dead fish, dead seabirds, maggots in the sand lining our waters. Thank you. Who can close their eyes and still

see these burned and etched and hurting into our hearts and our souls? Who lived inland and remembers walking outside even inland to smell a stench that was choking from the red tide?

I keep hearing these speakers that are for it that it will be minimal damage, minimalized harm. None is acceptable.

Okay. Next. Who signed up to get the sewage spill alerts? If you're not, you should be. These are happening so frequently it's horrifying. We're do many of these lead? To our waters.

Who's aware of the amount of chemicals that are unregulated, over 35 that are allowed to be sprayed into our lakes and our ponds and our waterways on a regular basis? Fish are showing up with lesions and tumors.

Then we have Mosaic polluting our waters, big sugar, Nestle trying to take the waters from our springs. You get the point. Enough already. Our waters are in need of healing, not more potential pollutants. This is not the area for an experiment.

I strongly oppose this. My friends that I'm here speaking for because they could not be here

are strongly opposing this. Thank you for your time.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. Number 50. And do we have 51? How about 52? Anyone with 52? It jumps to 60. I guess we're up to 67. Do we have 67 in the room?

CARTER HENNE: Yes.

JAN CONNERY: Okay. So you're going to be next. Do we have 68? Anybody 68? How about 69? 69. 69. Very good. So you will be next after that.

CARTER HENNE: Well, thank you everyone for sticking around to hear me talk. My name is Carter Henne. I'm a multi-generational Florida, a marine biologist, and an underwater farmer.

Originally -- I've been an underwater farmer all my life. I originally started growing fish for restoration and release into our estuaries and now I grow sea grass, mangrove, coral, and oysters for environmental restoration. I'm a native of Polk County where Mosaic is from and all the rest of the agriculture that comes down into the estuaries.

I get to spend a lot of time -- there was a time in my life where I spent years on end, 40

hours a week under water snorkeling, SCUBA diving, looking at environmental restoration projects, either plants, sea grass, or working around in them.

I became an underwater farmer. Originally started farming fish because I believe that fish, aquaculture has the ability to lessen the impact from overfishing.

I heard a couple times here that we want the waters to heal and we just need to leave them alone. The sad fact is that's not possible. We're a couple pontoon boats shy of a million boats, registered boats, in the state of Florida this year.

Economic development, we're not slowing it down. Lenar, Ryan, they're pummeling houses in here. There's no time to let waters heal.

I believe in offshore aquaculture. Not so much this project. I could care less. I've got no financial interest. Don't care anything about it.

What I am excited about this project though is that it's in shallow water and it's a close enough proximity to land to where there's regular monitoring. And I could be crazy, but I still

believe that EPA does the best job that they can with the information they get. They have got an incredibly hard job managing a country with so many different ideas.

Florida's the 17th largest economy in the world and we got there by agriculture, tourism, and industry. Aquaculture represents the cleanest source of protein production, period.

So I think this is very similar to wind farms where it kills many species of birds, and solar panels which devastates huge swaths of land. It's not the best out there, but it's something that needs to be studied. And thank you for doing such a good job on it.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. So I guess we're jumping down to 67.

DIANE DESENBERG: My name is Diane Desenberg. I'm a local resident, long time.

And I'm an ardent supporter of local agriculture of all types. I grow a lot of my own food. The idea of local aquaculture is a wonderful idea to me, but to do it in a nonpolluting way, I think that's a real key issue.

And that's true with growing any food. If

you grow it locally and you spray pesticides on it, what's the point of that. If you have an aquaculture farm and then you put antibiotics all over it, you're not really gaining anything there.

I have visited what I would consider a very sustainable oyster farm and the oysters in that area actually clean the water. So it got rid of nutrients. It actually made for a better place.

Why aren't we seeing a proposal for a farm that cleans the water? That would be my question. And why does the EPA -- I don't want to see a pollution permit. I want to see a project that cleans the water so we don't need a pollution permit.

Also I think the point has been raised a few times, but the big picture is lots of commercial farms here. You're doing a permit for one pilot project. That's meaningless. Your permitting process, by law, has to look at the cumulative impact and you're not doing that if you're only looking at the pilot.

Lots of talk about red tide. I just also want to point out that the fish that are raised surrounding by red tide, somebody mentioned oil.

If you've got oil on your liver you've got red tide in your surroundings, who is going to want to eat this fish? That almost in and of itself is a discharge to be concerned about.

And as far as antibiotics, I would say that under no condition should we be dumping antibiotics in the ocean. We have a huge problem with antibiotic resistance. The EPA should not be permitting any antibiotic dumping in the ocean. That should be a nix on the whole permit to begin with.

So, overall, I would just say we should be looking for a project that has a positive impact on our water, not a negative one. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much. Number 68?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: 69.

JAN CONNERY: Oh, you're 69?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: There's no 68.

JAN CONNERY: Is there a 70? And I think at 70 we start to go to the alphabet. And we're going to start with B because, I guess, A has left already. Do we have somebody with a B in the room to comment? How about a C? C left. Just a B? D? E? F? G? H? Anyone got a

letter?

JEANEANNE GETTLE: How about if anyone else is planning -- how about if we say if anyone is planning to comment if you will just start to cue up on the sides.

JAN CONNERY: Yeah, I think that's probably where we're at so please do that. Thank you.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: And if you've commented previously and you want to comment again and we have time at the end we'll let you do that.

TIM THURMAN: Good evening. My name is Tim Thurman. I'm an avid sailor, boater, fisherman. I love the area, love the water.

Why here? Why now? Our Gulf is already taking in approximately 40 percent of the effluent in the United States. Think of all the flooding in the heartlands last year. That has brought millions of gallons of polluted runoff to the Gulf.

Additionally, the Gulf is one of the largest dead zones in the world, most recently it measured between 6 to 7,000 square miles. Why would we want to take the risk of adding to that.

There are already approximately 1,850 offshore oil platforms. While they may provide

fish habitat, they also add pollution to the Gulf. One of the pollutants is mercury. Why would be want to add to this.

The Gulf is surrounded by approximately 1,680 miles of coastline. These states include Florida and Texas as the second and third most populous states in the nation. Why would we want to do an experiment here now. Why, when land-based closed-loop systems do not threaten the Gulf waters? Why now when the Gulf is Mexico is already extremely stressed by the items I just mentioned?

I strongly encourage you to not approve this permit.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you. 67.

CRIS COSTELLO: I'll just hold it. Good evening. My name is Cris Costello. I'm an organizing manager for the Sierra Club. I'm representing the National Sierra Club this evening.

In order to not repeat what so many eloquent people have stated, I'd like to bring the EPA's attention to the work the State has been doing over the past 13 or so years with regard to nutrient pollution.

If you're not already aware, you should be very aware that Sarasota County actually has taken nutrient pollution very seriously. In 2007 it passed the first strong, strict urban fertilizer ordinance because of our critically important ecosystem, our tourist economy, and the damage that had been wrought by red tide and other algae blooms.

Sarasota wasn't the only one. It's an issue that, if you're not aware, is the largest, the biggest, the most aggressively-fought environmental problem in the state, and that is harmful algae, whether it's red tide, cyanobacteria, et cetera.

Right now there are 13 counties that have strong ordinances that follow in the example of Sarasota County and there are over 90 municipalities. There isn't a county in the state that isn't doing their best using their resources to stop pollution at its source. That means stop pollution on the land before it gets into our receding water bodies and makes its way to either the Gulf or the Atlantic.

This proposal is obviously completely contrary to all of the work that the state has

been doing, the counties and the cities have been doing for the past 13 years. Not to mention the fact that Governor DeSantis early in -- in fact before he even took office, his transition team made it clear that his dedication was to stop nutrient loading of our receiving water bodies and in fact in the last year he has convened two task forces, the harmful algal bloom red tide task force and the blue-green algae task force, whose time and effort and resources are being spent to stop pollution at its source on the land before it gets into our receiving water bodies.

This project, this Kampachi Farms project, is the antithesis of the work that the State has been doing aggressively over the past 13 years. And I say 13 years because that's how long I've been with the Sierra Club. I'm sure it predates me. This is the antithesis of what the State needs and in fact is contrary to the State's desires and their work.

The EPA, I urge the EPA to pay attention to the grave environmental damage that nutrient pollution is doing, not only in the Gulf, but everywhere around the State, and to make a sensible decision to deny the permit. Thank you.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: I think we have somebody. Are you wanting to speak?

JAN CONNERY: So we have someone. Yes, please come on up.

Does anyone else have a number or letter that we haven't gotten to yet? This is your time.

DORIN SUAREZ: So I get to inflict pain upon you all twice tonight. Once on behalf of Professor Benetti --

JEANEANNE GETTLE: That's fine. Do I have anyone else in the audience that has not spoken that wants to speak?

JAN CONNERY: He has spoken.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: I know that. I'm fine with him speaking again.

I'm going to open it back up to people. If you want to come back up and speak for another three minutes I will let you do that.

JAN CONNERY: So if folks would like to speak.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: You can come back to speak.

JAN CONNERY: Why don't you come on up here so we'll be aware of who they are. And we're going to do it in three-minute increments?

JEANEANNE GETTLE: Three-minute increments.

JAN CONNERY: Okay. Just want to be clear about that. Please go ahead, sir.

DORIN SUAREZ: Thank you. So this time it's on my behalf, not on Professor Benetti's.

I'm a resident here with my family. I've been in the aquaculture industry for about 37 years, 20 of those working on issues of sustainability. Specifically issues of sustainability.

I am not a cheerleader for aquaculture. I recognize that there have been many mistakes made in aquaculture. And aquaculture is a tool. It's like a hammer. You can use a hammer to kill somebody, you can use a hammer build a house to live in peace. So it's just how you use it.

I recognize that this issue has become very emotional and then they become belief. It's not so much that people can't convince you, but I urge all of you to look at the science. The science in this is very clear.

And, by the way, I know everybody here comes with good intentions. We all are well-intentioned. I consider myself an environmentalist.

Like I said, caged fish farming can be very bad for the environment. If I have time here I could speak for hours about examples of what I've seen in Asia specifically. Also in Europe. But I can also tell you that the U.S. has very good laws and regulations, including those of the EPA, and that they do protect us.

And I can also tell you that I know the Kampachi folks. I'm not related to them, but I know them. They are good people. They're real people. They know what they're doing. They do things correctly and legally.

And, by the way, when we buy 90 percent of our seafood outside of the country, what we're doing is we're exporting that environmental footprint. We have to think in like one world. We cannot think just like ourselves. By buying this 90 percent we're exporting that same environmental footprint elsewhere. Why don't we do it here under our laws where we know it's done correctly.

A couple really quick points. Fish hook. Whether it's wild fish or farm fish, they hook the same.

Other points. Assimilation versus dilution.

Everybody here's thinking that fish food and nutrients just go there and they move with the tide and they hit us. It's not like that. The ocean has dozens of processes to clean this and to detoxify it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Red tide is one of those.

DORIN SUAREZ: Red tide is, unfortunately, one of them, but, you know, the scale of this test -- and we need this information. We should not be afraid of having the information. The scale of this test is not even the rounding error of 1 percent of what the real problem is, which is agriculture and mining as far as red tide. Thank you very much.

JAN CONNERY: Can you give us your name just once more for the record.

DORIN SUAREZ: Certainly. Dorin Suarez.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: So let me just clarify for the record what we're going to do now. The public hearing will stay open until 9:30 when I will close the public hearing. I will probably close it around 9:25, 9:30. And so if there are people in the room that have spoken and or have not spoken and you would like to speak between now and 9:25, then we will do it at three-minute

intervals until no one else wants to speak, at which time I will keep the hearing open until 9:30.

So just to clarify what I'm doing. So that is why I'm letting people speak again if you are here and you would like to speak. And what I would ask is that you would cue up over here. It will be in three-minute intervals. And the same process applies, please state your name for the record and then give us your comments.

JAN CONNERY: Okay. Looks like we've got some folks cued up. And feel free to come up at any time.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: I do want to also clarify is someone comes in who has not spoken I will let them speak first.

MARGARET JEAN CANNON: Sounds fine. Once again, my name is Margaret Jean Cannon. Just a few things. There are two comments.

I know we heard about climate change. We know our Gulf waters have gotten warmer, so I just want to point that out. And that has been a real problem is the fact that that's one of the reasons we get more of the red tide is because of the warmer waters. So this is a big problem in

our future.

The other thing that I wanted to bring up, in my mind I often thought about this, is the Shakespeare the play, The Merchant of Venice, when Portia asks or tells him he can take a pound of flesh, but not one drop of blood. They can take some of that water, but not one drop of my water.

So I'm tired of seeing people take our resources and use them and, again, with the idea that they're going to improve our environment or improve our lives by providing us fish from here when we ship 70 percent of our fish out of the country. So I think we need to take care of ourselves and we do our fish through the normal aquaculture farming that we have. So thank you very much.

JAN CONNERY: Thank you very much.

KATHY BENZ: Thank you very much. Again, my name is Kathy Benz. I'm the president of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, and I appreciate the opportunity to have a little bit more of the research that I've done made public.

In natural conditions the subject species of

this project feeds throughout day and night as they circulate widely. Surely, their natural feeding cycle will be broken. Imposing artificial regulated feeding would disrupt their natural behavior, metabolism, and health. They're a carnivore and a predator. They are not an animal that eats vegetation.

Feeding them a vegetarian diet would not provide them with proper nutrition and it would not then be passed on to those of us that consume it. If you try to feed them animal protein you wind up with even worse issues because then you're decimating other species, either locally or distant, through capturist food or by their own food source being harvested to feed a heard, leaving the native fish to starve.

Concentration of this wide-ranging species that normally lives in fast-moving small groups through varying location into stationary pens will lead to unnatural behavior, parasites, disease, and stress. They may even turn on one another in order to get the proteins that they want throughout the day.

They also will be denied contact with the species that helped them maintain their health.

For instance, they're highly subject to skin parasites and in nature the way they rid themselves of those skin parasites is by rubbing up against sharks going by them because the rough skin of the sharks removes the parasites. So these fish are never going to have an opportunity to lose their parasites, so medication is going to have to be put into the water to try to kill those parasites along with the antibiotics and everything else.

So anyway, the shallow volume of the Gulf is a live environment. It has species living there. We are going to endanger them.

One of the things that's most important if we're going to have aquaculture what we need to do is shellfish our aquaculture. It would at least purify our water. It would not contaminate it. This is what we should be promoting, not finfish aquaculture. Thank you.

JOSEPH DAVIS: This is my second time around and I'll make it brief, but I do think that one thing needs to be said.

JAN CONNERY: Give us your name.

JOSEPH DAVIS: Joseph Davis. I'm sorry. A couple things need to be said.

This idea of not in my back yard, not never here is just ridiculous. You have to deal with issues as they occur.

It's not a matter -- it's like homelessness. Everybody wants to do away with the homeless, they want to help the homeless, but we don't want a shelter in our back yard.

Want us to eat shellfish instead of finfish. Well, people want to eat finfish. There are a lot of people, just look around in here, they're never going to eat those oysters. You could produce a ton of them, they aren't going to eat them. They may eat a few muscles.

You can't substitute what you think people ought to do because it makes the water cleaner for what people want. So what you have to do is deal with the reality.

And it's totally unfair to characterize Mote Marine, who is a pillar of this community and who does great work in restoring coral and restocking fish in this neighborhood, to cast them as nothing more than a financial partner with a commercial fish farm, they're a lot more than that. They're a resource for this community that has contributed a lot and continues to contribute

a lot. It is grossly unfair to throw them under that bus.

It's also grossly unfair to blame the EPA for the fact that they have to consider a fish farming permit. People say, well, you shouldn't even consider that. EPA doesn't have a choice in what they consider. I'm a lawyer. I was a federal lawyer for years.

EPA operates under laws and regulations. If somebody wants to do something, they can't tell them, you shouldn't do that. That's not ethical. The only they can do is apply the laws and the regulations that they have. And that's exactly what they're doing here. They're trying to be an evenhanded application of these laws.

Now, you may disagree with those facts, you may disagree with their science, you may disagree with their opinions and, believe me, I'm as upset as anyone else about the efforts of the current Administration to weaken environmental protection, this is not that. This has been going on for years and it is a straight-up effort to assess the environmental damage and we ought to look at it in that way.

The gentleman who said he was an underwater

fish farmer, he spoke the truth. The truth is you're not going to be able to just leave it alone. If you leave it alone, we're going to harvest more wild fish, we're going to overharvest more. Continued pressure to do that.

That's not helping the sport fisherman. That's not helping the wild fish industry. It's just a head-in-the-sand approach. We have to do something.

And so why don't we do a pilot project that tells us whether it works or not. We can stop it if it doesn't work. You can stop it midstream even. EPA has the authority to reconsider. If they don't, it doesn't mean if this project is a success that a large-scale project is going to be approved automatically. Have to go through the same process all over again.

If you don't like that, that's the time to object to that, not to object to an experimental pilot project that is really designed to collect data to help the government and scientists and Mote and others assess the impact.

TOM BARWIN: Good evening. My name is Tom Barwin. I'm the city manager for the City of Sarasota.

I attended tonight to listen to the comments and I'd just like to compliment the EPA and welcome you here and thank you for listening to the comments of our region's public tonight. I think you've done a wonderful job organizing the public hearing.

Our policy makers have just recently heard about this subject. Cleaning up the Gulf and restoring it as aggressively as we can is a huge public policy issue, obviously for the region, certainly for the city commission here in the City of Sarasota. So I will brief them on what we heard tonight and I would respectfully request a copy of the minutes as soon as we can get them. Do you have any idea when that might happen? I know there's been a lot of commentary tonight.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: I'm sorry. I don't know, but once we determine that I will let you know.

TOM BARWIN: Thank you. You have my e-mail, so whenever you can get anything to me, we would appreciate it. And also thank you for all the public who came out to comment and really share a lot of really helpful and interesting knowledge tonight. Thank you.

RACHAEL CURRAN: Rachael Curran, staff

attorney, Center for Biological Diversity. This is my second time up here.

Just really wanted to quickly address some sort of mischaracterization of the general opposition to this farm being that it's based on emotion and not science.

Our particular complaint with the Environmental Review thus far is that it does not take into account the best available science. For instance, that draft Environmental Assessment cites the intergovernmental panel on climate change's third and fourth assessment, failing to even consider the 2019 special report on oceans and climate change and the climate change expected impacts on ocean currents, the very ocean currents that are being relied upon to say these will not carry red tide to shore or feed red tide in anyway.

We will be submitting extensive supplemental comments by the February 4th deadline. I hope that all that science is taken into account, but our primary complaint is not on the basis of emotion, it is certainly based on the inadequate analysis of the best available science in this Environmental Review and the fact that an

Environmental Impact Statement has not been completed for a project with this significant impact. Thank you.

JAN CONNERY: Thanks so much.

JEANEANNE GETTLE: So do we have anyone else in the room that wants to comment at this time?

Okay. So this hearing will remain open until 9:30. I will remain here. We will remain in the room. We will take additional comments if someone comes in and wants to provide comments.

If any of you decide you want to provide comments, if you let us know, we'll simply be sitting up here and we'll take those comments at that time.

I want to remind everyone as you are sitting here or leaving that our comment period is open until February 4th. We will accept written comments. And I encourage you to pick up a fact sheet. It gives you the way to submit those written comments.

So we will just remain here pending any further comments.

(Off the record from 8:57 p.m. to 9:20 p.m.)

JEANEANNE GETTLE: So we are back on the record so that I can close out the hearing. And

I guess I will just say thank you to all of you that assisted us with the hearing because I think that's all the people that we have left. And so we're going to go ahead and close out the hearing.

We are extending our public comment period through February 4, 2020. EPA will review and consider all comments received during the public comment period in both writing and at today's public hearing. EPA will prepare a document known as Response to Comments and will briefly describe and address significant issues raised during the comment period and what provisions, if any, in the draft permit have been changed and the reasons for the change.

A notice of availability of the final NPDES permit decision and the Response to Comments will be published in the Sarasota Herald Tribune once a final permit decision has been made. In addition, the notice of availability, the Response to Comments, and the final permit decision will be mailed and e-mailed to everyone that commented about the draft permit for which EPA has a mailing or e-mail address. The complete final permit decision and the Response

to Comments will be available on the EPA website as well.

Additional information regarding these procedures is available by contacting Mr. Kip Tyler at (404) 562-9294.

Again, I thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or comments you can always reach EPA in the ways listed in the handout that we have made available. This hearing is adjourned.

(Hearing adjourned at 9:22 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA )
COUNTY OF MANATEE )

I, Mary Ann Smith, Registered Professional Reporter, Registered Merit Reporter, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did report the foregoing proceedings; and that the transcript, pages 1 through 160, is a true record of the proceedings.

I further certify that I am not a relative, employee, attorney, or counsel for any of the parties, nor am I a relative or employee of any of the parties' attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I financially interested in the action.

DATED this 18th day of February, 2020.

Mary Ann Smith, RPR, RMR

**b**

Federal Rules of Civil Procedure

Rule 30

(e) Review By the Witness; Changes.

(1) Review; Statement of Changes. On request by the deponent or a party before the deposition is completed, the deponent must be allowed 30 days after being notified by the officer that the transcript or recording is available in which:

(A) to review the transcript or recording; and

(B) if there are changes in form or substance, to sign a statement listing the changes and the reasons for making them.

(2) Changes Indicated in the Officer's Certificate. The officer must note in the certificate prescribed by Rule 30(f)(1) whether a review was requested and, if so, must attach any changes the deponent makes during the 30-day period.

VERITEXT LEGAL SOLUTIONS
COMPANY CERTIFICATE AND DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Veritext Legal Solutions represents that the foregoing transcript is a true, correct and complete transcript of the colloquies, questions and answers as submitted by the court reporter. Veritext Legal Solutions further represents that the attached exhibits, if any, are true, correct and complete documents as submitted by the court reporter and/or attorneys in relation to this deposition and that the documents were processed in accordance with our litigation support and production standards.

Veritext Legal Solutions is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of client and witness information, in accordance with the regulations promulgated under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as amended with respect to protected health information and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, as amended, with respect to Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Physical transcripts and exhibits are managed under strict facility and personnel access controls. Electronic files of documents are stored in encrypted form and are transmitted in an encrypted fashion to authenticated parties who are permitted to access the material. Our data is hosted in a Tier 4 SSAE 16 certified facility.

Veritext Legal Solutions complies with all federal and State regulations with respect to the provision of court reporting services, and maintains its neutrality and independence regardless of relationship or the financial outcome of any litigation. Veritext requires adherence to the foregoing professional and ethical standards from all of its subcontractors in their independent contractor agreements.

Inquiries about Veritext Legal Solutions' confidentiality and security policies and practices should be directed to Veritext's Client Services Associates indicated on the cover of this document or at www.veritext.com.