

Mr. Craig Hesterlee
USEPA Region 4, NPDES Permitting
Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303-8960

May 3, 2021

Dear Mr. Hesterlee:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) issued a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the Ocean Era aquaculture project in the Gulf of Mexico off the Florida coast on September 30. This permit is presently on hold and under review by USEPA.

Promoting sustainable aquaculture in the U.S. might be in our nation's best interest. However, if these operations are not carefully planned, they can have unintended consequences on the environment and the local economy. Major concerns raised by environmental groups about this project are the impact of waste disposal on water quality and marine wildlife, as well as the potential to exacerbate harmful algal blooms. Aquaculture facilities generate large amounts of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) and waste products, require heavy doses of antibiotics and other chemicals to maintain fish health, and create farmed populations that are low in genetic diversity. This project, in the warm, shallow waters along the west Florida shelf would be in an area where Florida red tide, caused by the organism *Karenia brevis*, forms and intensifies. It is known that this organism can use these sources of nutrients. Many coastal communities that want to keep the ocean swimmable and fishable and livable for marine wildlife and Floridians and tourists alike regard this experimental fish farm as an unnecessary and unreasonable risk.

Consequently, the City Council of Venice, Florida strongly urges the EPA to rescind this permit until further studies and scientific reviews of this project can be completed.

Sincerely,

Venice City Council