

# Report applauds aquaculture

*Task force issues framework for saving fish-farming industry*

After years of debate, Maine now has a plan for aquaculture's future - a 190-page tome that essentially lays out a plan for saving the state's beleaguered fish-farming industry. Legislators who serve on the state's [Marine Resources Committee](#) will likely spend their weekend perusing the hefty report issued just moments before the close of the workweek Friday by the Governor's Task Force on the Planning and Development of Marine Aquaculture in Maine.

The overall message of the task force report is that fish and shellfish farming should be an integral part of the Maine coastline in years to come.

Through 95 individual recommendations, the task force seeks to resolve problems that have long stymied legislators, leading to the task force's creation last year.

Several recommendations seek to improve the often-contentious lease approval process by engaging municipal governments and the public in the process.

Other sections of the report propose standards for what should be acceptable for noise, light and visual impacts that might affect neighbors of fish and shellfish farms. The task force also suggests a marketing campaign to accustom visitors to the realities of Maine's "working waterfront" - including fish farms.

To protect wild, endangered Atlantic salmon, the salmon farming industry as well as the state and federal governments need to work on tagging programs and salmon research, the report said.

The task force also recommended that public hatcheries, like those where the state raises Atlantic salmon for release into Maine rivers, be required to meet the tagging requirements that a federal lawsuit recently required of commercial operations.

Potential negative environmental affects of aquaculture are being addressed by the [Department of Marine Resources](#) ' existing programs, the task force said. However, the task force did recommend encouraging further research into the issue, as well as incentive programs for fish farms to reduce pollution levels.

To reduce the impact, the task force embraced the idea of polyculture - clustering fish and shellfish farming operations.

Enforcement of new and existing rules should be enhanced, with increased funding if possible, the report said.

To reduce conflicts along Maine's coast, the task force proposes boosting communication between the aquaculture, boating, tourism and commercial fishing communities through relevant state agencies.

Bay management, an emerging approach for balancing all uses of the ocean, is intriguing, but does not fit within the task force's purview, the report said.

Maine's aquaculture industry needs to be promoted, the task force said, but suggested that the Department of Marine Resources should not be asked to perform the dual - and often contradictory - role of booster and regulator. Such agencies as the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Economic and Community Development should be tapped for promotion and development responsibilities, the report said.

Task force Chairman Paul Anderson of Maine Sea Grant was not available for comment after distributing the report Friday afternoon. However, Anderson has previously said that

the task force hopes that some of the simpler recommendations could be considered by legislators before this session ends in April.

Gov. [John Baldacci](#) was briefed on the report Friday morning, but, busy with budget negotiations, he has not yet fully digested the findings, spokesman Lee Umphrey said.

The governor was pleased to see the report reflect his belief that aquaculture is an important piece of the state's marine resources industry, Umphrey said.

With Baldacci's and legislators' help, the task force hopes its report will realize the following vision for the state's aquaculture industry:

"Marine aquaculture is an important and compatible element in Maine's diverse coastal economy. Aquaculture contributes to satisfying global market demands and benefits local communities and the public interest by producing high-quality products, providing economic opportunities, and operating in an environmentally sustainable fashion. Maine's planning and regulatory process is adaptive, inclusive and fair, and supports the growth of the industry in an economically competitive and environmentally sustainable way."