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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

March 9, 2015

Colonel Kevin P. Landers, Sr.
Army Corps of Engineers – Wilmington
69 Darlington Avenue
Wilmington, NC 28403

Secretary Donald R. van der Vaart
N.C. Dept. of Environment & Natural Resources
1601 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1601

Dear Col. Landers and Sec. van der Vart:

Last week I received the attached letter from a constituent – Mr. Jay Styron of Cedar Island, North Carolina. Mr. Styron is the President of the North Carolina Shellfish Growers Association. He believes federal and state regulations are stifling the growth of the shellfish industry in North Carolina, especially relative to our neighbors in the commonwealth of Virginia.

Specifically, Mr. Styron states:

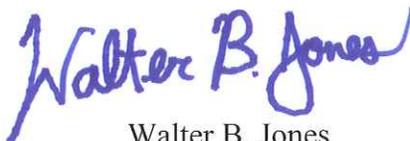
“The regulatory landscape is complicated, but the root of the problem lies in a policy that has been established by the Army Corps who claims authority over structures in navigable waters and regulates protected resources (such as eelgrass) through a consultation process with NOAA. While most states have reached a workable accommodation with the ACOE on eelgrass issues, each ACOE District provides their own interpretations of the guidance and in the Carolinas we have Districts that have adopted an unworkable zero tolerance policy for eelgrass disturbance.

In North Carolina the ACOE has delegated its regulatory authority over shellfish aquaculture to the state Dept. of Marine Fisheries. The state, following consultations with NOAA’s Office of Protected Resources, has adopted a unique and overly restrictive policy of protecting beds that used to exist according to old maps, even though declining water clarity has led to drastic declines in eelgrass coverage. These beds will not return unless the water quality is restored, and shellfish are a necessary and vital part of that process.”

We all share the responsibility for balancing the protection of Eastern North Carolina’s coastal environment while creating jobs and growing our economy. Mr. Styron presents a compelling case for how we might be able to do a better job of achieving that goal.

With that in mind, I respectfully request that you launch a review of these policies to see if a more workable leasing and permitting process for shellfish aquaculture in North Carolina can be established. Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Walter B. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "W".

Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress