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 Responsibility

Do you know offshore aquaculture when you see it?

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By James Wright

Aquaculture researchers: Scientific community and regulators need aligned definitions, terminology



How can anything be managed, if it cannot be defined?

For a nascent industry like offshore aquaculture – fish or shellfish farming outside of protected, near-shore conditions – clearly defining what it is, in concrete terms, could be crucial if it is to reach its potential as a solution to some of farmed seafood's environmental impacts.

In [a paper](#)

Offshore aquaculture needs to be clearly defined in order to assess its impacts and benefits, a recently released study determined.

(<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fmars.2017.00154/full#B33>), recently published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, lead author Halley Froehlich, Ph.D., and her research team concluded that a deep dive into existing scientific literature on offshore aquaculture – or at least what the authors of those studies called “offshore aquaculture” – was first necessary in order to critically assess the impacts and benefits of moving fish farming operations “slightly farther and slightly deeper” out to sea.

Challenging conditions at sea and the related costs are a leading reason why offshore aquaculture activity worldwide is still quite limited. In the United States, it's virtually non-existent, despite a management plan in place for the **Gulf of Mexico** (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/aquaculture/), for instance.

For untapped areas like the Gulf, Froehlich believes aquaculture activity is also blocked by a chicken-and-egg kind of problem.

"You want the research that informs the policy that then informs the development – that's the ideal chain of command. But with aquaculture, we're finding that to actually get information, you need to have it happening in that environment. To get permits to put something in the water, it's a lot of money and time," she said. But without that farming activity, it's "inherently difficult to do the science."

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