



*Via electronic mail*

July 27th, 2022

County of Humboldt  
Humboldt County Planning Commission  
Alan Bongio, Chair  
Planningclerk@co.humboldt.ca.us

Re: Nordic Aquafarms California, LLC; Coastal Development Permit and Special Permit

Dear Humboldt County Planning Commissioners and Planning Director Ford,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Nordic Aquafarms LLC Coastal Development Permit and Special Permit.

Although we have very much appreciated that the leadership of Nordic has made itself accessible during the planning and environmental review process and that they have been willing to address some of our concerns with the project, we still have outstanding concerns with the project as it stands. This is a massive project, as exemplified by the fact that it would use as much energy as the cities of Eureka and Fortuna combined. It would also be the largest such project that Nordic has undertaken. Although it claims that the technology is not new, Nordic has yet to prove that it can be done at this scale. Many of our concerns, from Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHG) to transportation impacts to concerns about nutrient-loading from the

discharge, would be lessened if the project started out smaller and then scaled up as it was proven that it would not negatively impact the environment. When we have brought these concerns to Nordic they have responded that the project is happening in phases, so that is effectively the same as what we are requesting. We disagree and would like to see adaptive management plans in place before the project is initiated and certain criteria met before it is scaled up into Phase 2. Some of our concerns are outside of the purview of the Planning Commission and we will also address them with the permitting agencies who do have jurisdiction over them. The concerns that we believe have not been adequately addressed include the following:

1. **Ocean outfall:** We appreciate that Nordic has agreed to more monitoring of the ocean discharge than initially proposed. However, we still have concerns with the data that was used in the FEIR to support the conclusion that the wastewater effluent entering the Pacific Ocean via the existing RMT II outfall pipe will not result in a significant impact to biological resources. This conclusion is based on a modeling study that utilized a dataset collected approximately 3.5 miles south-southeast of the Redwood Marine Terminal II diffuser, inside the bay entrance, rather than in the area that will be affected by the discharge. We believe additional studies are needed to determine that there will be no significant impact from the discharge and appreciate that Nordic has agreed to begin baseline monitoring at the discharge site prior to full build-out. However, we have concerns about the plan to conduct post-discharge monitoring *after* the project is at full build-out and request that **as a condition of approval Nordic begin post-discharge monitoring as soon as the facility begins discharging (during Phase 1) and be required to provide evidence that the discharge, including increased nutrients and decreased dissolved oxygen levels, is not impacting water quality or biological resources, or contributing to harmful algal blooms (HABs), before moving into phase 2 of the project.**
2. **Transportation impacts:** Despite Nordic's assertion that 95 additional trucks per week on State Highway 255 will not impact traffic safety, the fact that the route passes by many areas utilized for coastal access and that it bisects the community of Manila leads us to believe there will in fact be increased exposure to unsafe traffic conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as residents and visitors to coastal access areas. Many of those trucks will also be traveling on Highway 101 through the City of Eureka, which has significant transportation safety issues. We suggest that **as a condition of approval, Nordic be required to contribute funding to planned traffic safety improvements along the routes they will be utilizing.**
3. **Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with Transportation:** We appreciate that Nordic has adopted the suggested Transportation Management Plan and will be implementing a Carpooling and Vanpooling program and incentivizing employees to not drive single occupancy vehicles to the site. This will mitigate some of the GHG emissions associated with transportation. However, there will still be significant emissions associated with product deliveries and transportation of waste. We suggest that **as a**

**condition of approval, Nordic adopt an adaptive management plan requiring transitioning to zero emission trucks and other vehicles as they become commercially available, rather than waiting until required by state law.**

4. **Source of fish feed and associated Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions:** Throughout the environmental review process, Nordic has stated that it cannot at this point determine what source of fish feed it will be using. We understand the need for flexibility as a project is being developed, however we believe it is reasonable to require Nordic, **as a condition of approval, to commit to using a commercially-available feed that has the lowest carbon footprint possible, and that this be revisited on a yearly basis to ensure that the feed being used is always the least carbon intensive that is commercially available.**
  
5. **Source of eggs and potential for introduction of disease:**  
Without a known source of Atlantic Salmon eggs on the scale the project would require, it is unknown whether importing eggs would introduce diseases into Humboldt Bay and nearby coastal waters.
  
6. **Mitigation of impacts from the bay intakes:**  
The analysis of the Area of Productivity Forgone has not been completed, so it is premature to determine whether the proposed mitigation measures will result in less than significant impacts.
  
7. **Inadequate Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA):**  
According to the Coastal Development Permit staff report, “high quality dune mat located on the project site will be protected by an established requirement of a minimum 35-foot buffer. Within the buffer is a 20-foot-wide fire road.” The proposed buffer is not consistent with Section 30240 a and b of the Coastal Act<sup>1</sup> or Policy 3.30 of the Humboldt Bay Area Plan,<sup>2</sup> which both state that
  - (a) Environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHAs) shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on such resources shall be allowed.
  - (b) Development in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat areas and parks and recreation areas shall be sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade such areas, and shall be compatible with the continuance of such habitat areas.

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<sup>1</sup> California Coastal Act, Section 30240. <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/fedcd/cach3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Humboldt Bay Area Plan of the Humboldt County Local Coastal Program, Section 3.30. <https://humboldt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/50844/Humboldt-Bay-Area-Local-Coastal-Plan>

Like many in the community, we are excited about the prospect of seeing the former pulp mill site remediated. However, the massive scale of the project and the fact that Nordic has not proven success with a project of this size causes us serious concern for the health of the Bay and the ocean, as well as all of the people and species who rely on them. Starting with a smaller project and having clear benchmarks of when the project can scale up would go a long way to addressing these concerns. If that is not possible, **we suggest that the Planning Commission consider issuing a CDP that expires within a set amount of time, such as 5 or 10 years, so that Nordic has the opportunity to prove that this project will not significantly impact the environment when the time comes to return to the Planning Commission to renew the CDP.**

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