



US009115008B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Farrish

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,115,008 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Aug. 25, 2015**

(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR UPFLOW
ALGAE SCRUBBER, MACROALGAL
PHOTOBIOREACTOR AND SEAWEED
CULTIVATOR**

(76) Inventor: **SantaMonica**



(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 274 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **13/989,040**

(22) PCT Filed: **Mar. 30, 2012**

(86) PCT No.: **PCT/US2012/031714**

§ 371 (c)(1),

(2), (4) Date: **May 22, 2013**

(87) PCT Pub. No.: **WO2012/154328**

PCT Pub. Date: **Nov. 15, 2012**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2013/0233779 A1 Sep. 12, 2013

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/485,560, filed on May 12, 2011, provisional application No. 61/490,820, filed on May 27, 2011, provisional application No. 61/554,455, filed on Nov. 1, 2011, provisional application No. 61/569,195, filed on Dec. 9, 2011, provisional application No. 61/570,462, filed on Dec. 14, 2011, provisional application No. 61/569,211, filed on Jan. 14, 2012, provisional application No. 61/591,975, filed on Jan. 29, 2012.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

C02F 3/32 (2006.01)

C02F 3/10 (2006.01)

A01G 33/00 (2006.01)

A01K 63/04 (2006.01)

C02F 3/20 (2006.01)

C02F 103/00 (2006.01)

C02F 103/42 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **C02F 3/322** (2013.01); **A01G 33/00** (2013.01); **A01K 63/045** (2013.01); **C02F 3/101** (2013.01); **C02F 3/20** (2013.01); **C02F 2103/007** (2013.01); **C02F 2103/42** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC **C02F 3/322**; **C02F 3/101**; **C02F 3/20**; **C02F 2103/007**; **C02F 2103/42**; **A01K 63/045**; **A01G 33/00**

USPC **210/167.22**, **602**, **220**, **221.1**, **221.2**
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,253,271 A * 3/1981 Raymond 47/1.4
5,527,456 A 6/1996 Jensen
5,591,341 A 1/1997 Jensen

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

RU 2005115562 10/2005
RU 71901 3/2008

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

PCT Search Report, International Application No. PCT/US 2012/031714 filed Mar. 30, 2012, dated Jul. 26, 2012.

Primary Examiner — Fred Prince

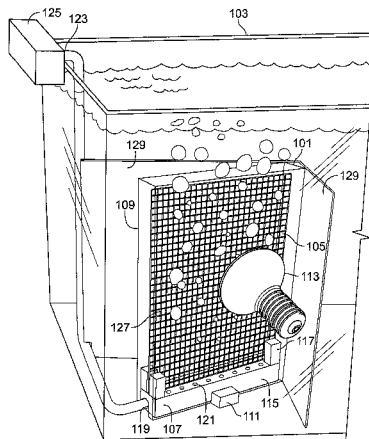
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Blakely Sokoloff Taylor & Zafman LLP

(57)

ABSTRACT

An apparatus for water filtration, that includes a macroalgal attachment means defining a first macroalgal attachment surface and a bubbling means including, a housing defining a gas inlet and a set of gas bubble ports, and a coupling means. The coupling means secures the macroalgal attachment means to the bubbling means and aligns the first macroalgal attachment surface with the set of gas bubble ports such that a first portion of the gas bubbles to be produced by the gas bubble ports are directed to travel along the first macroalgal attachment surface in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface.

22 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



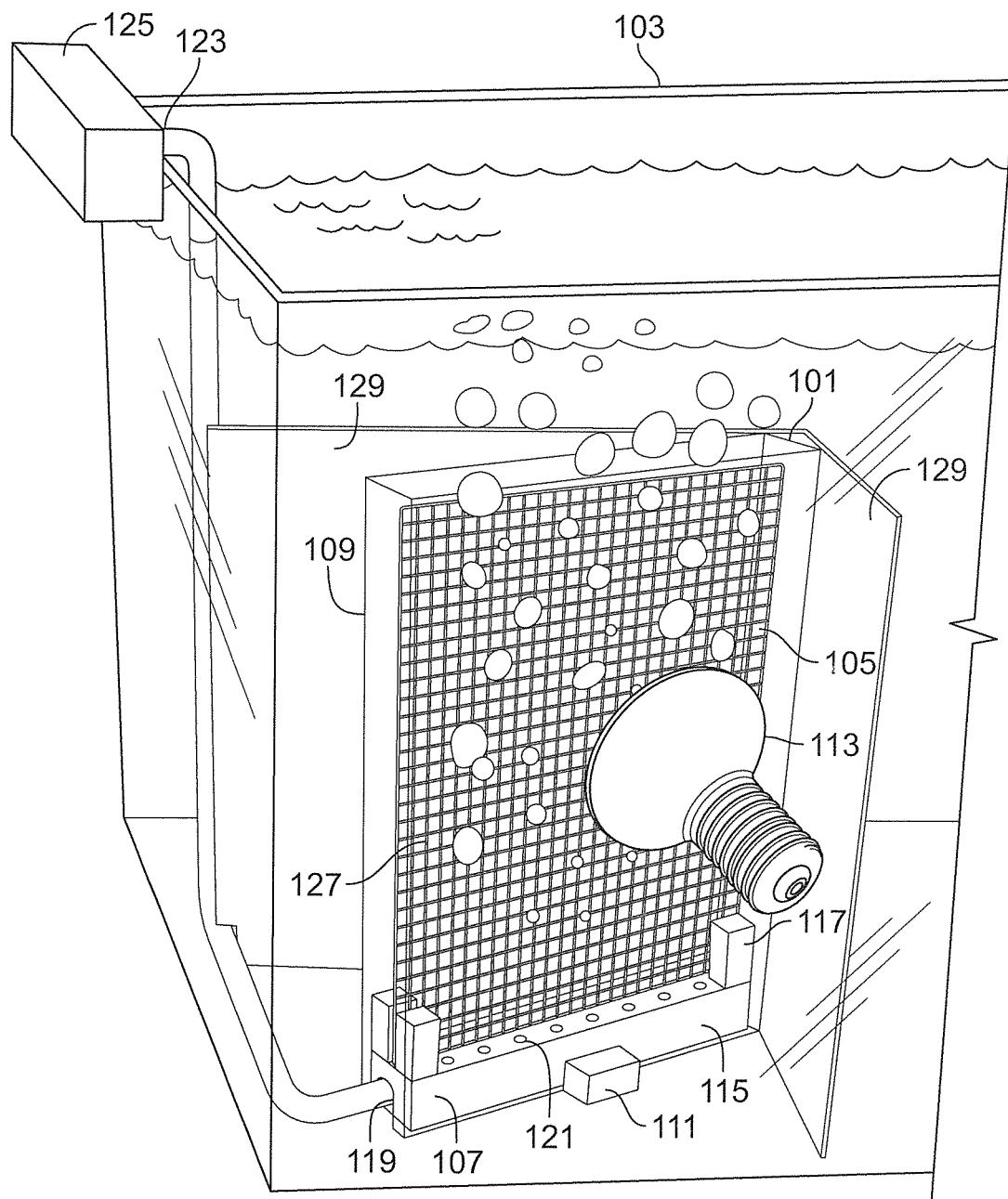


FIG. 1

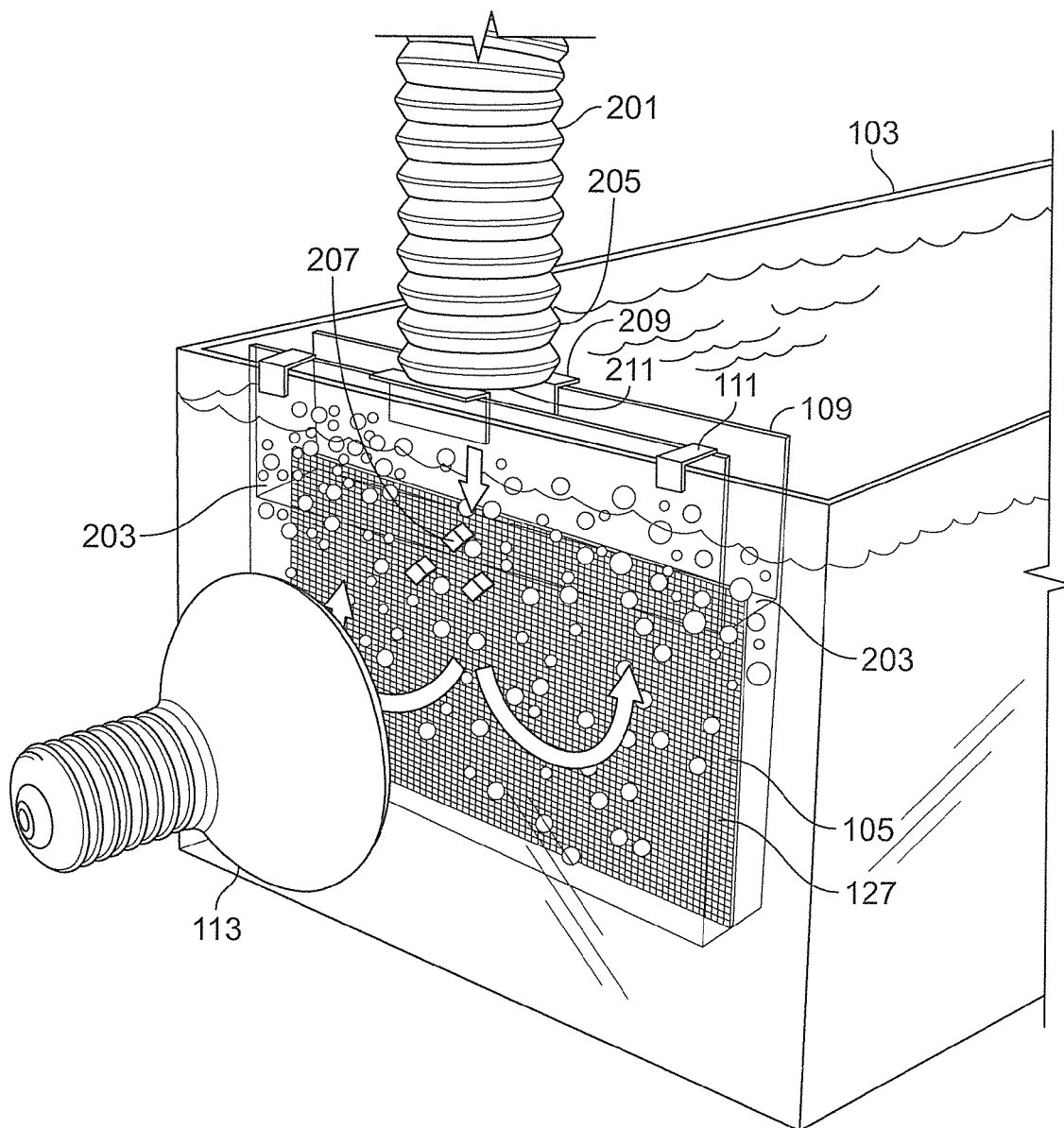


FIG. 2

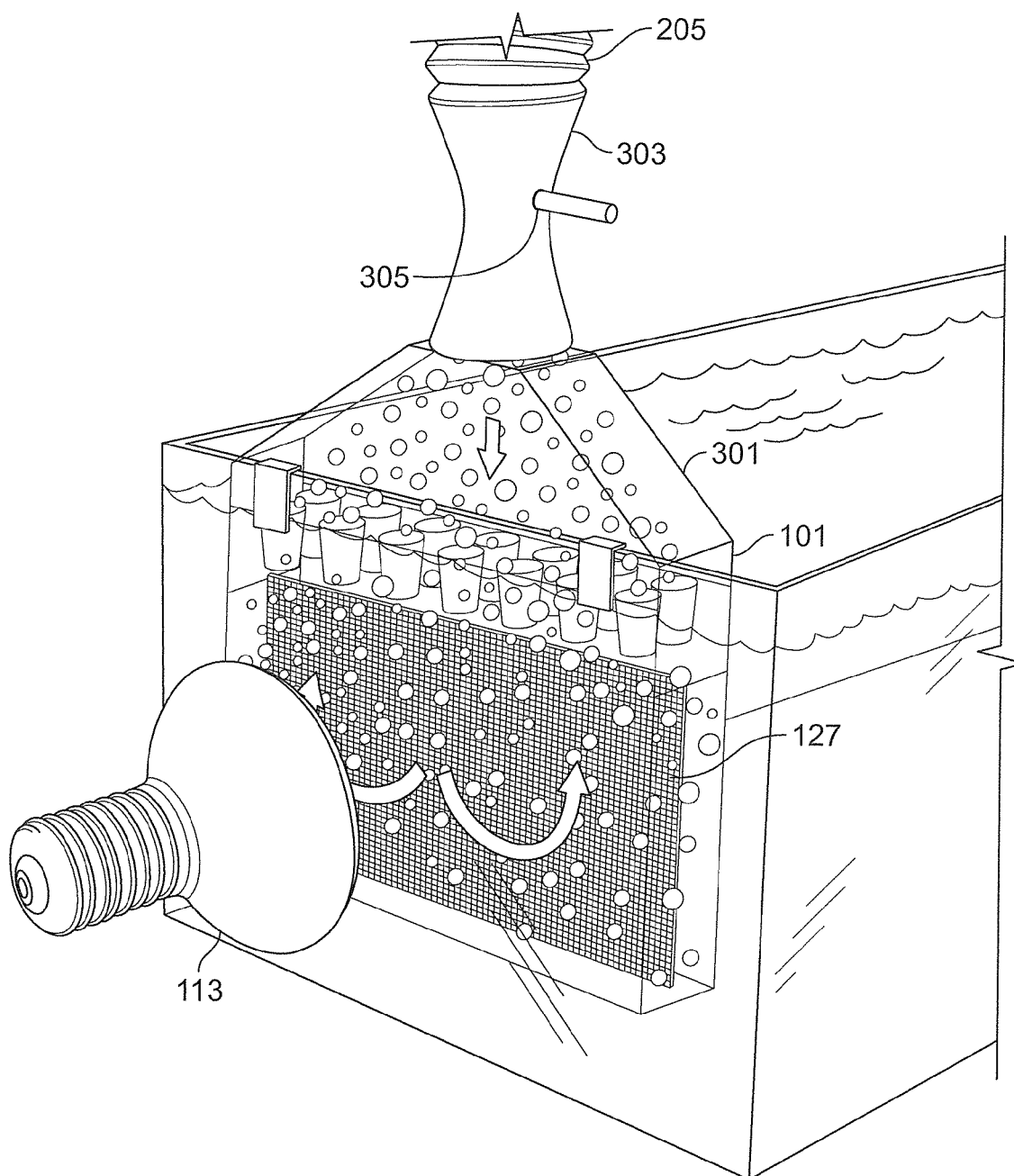


FIG. 3

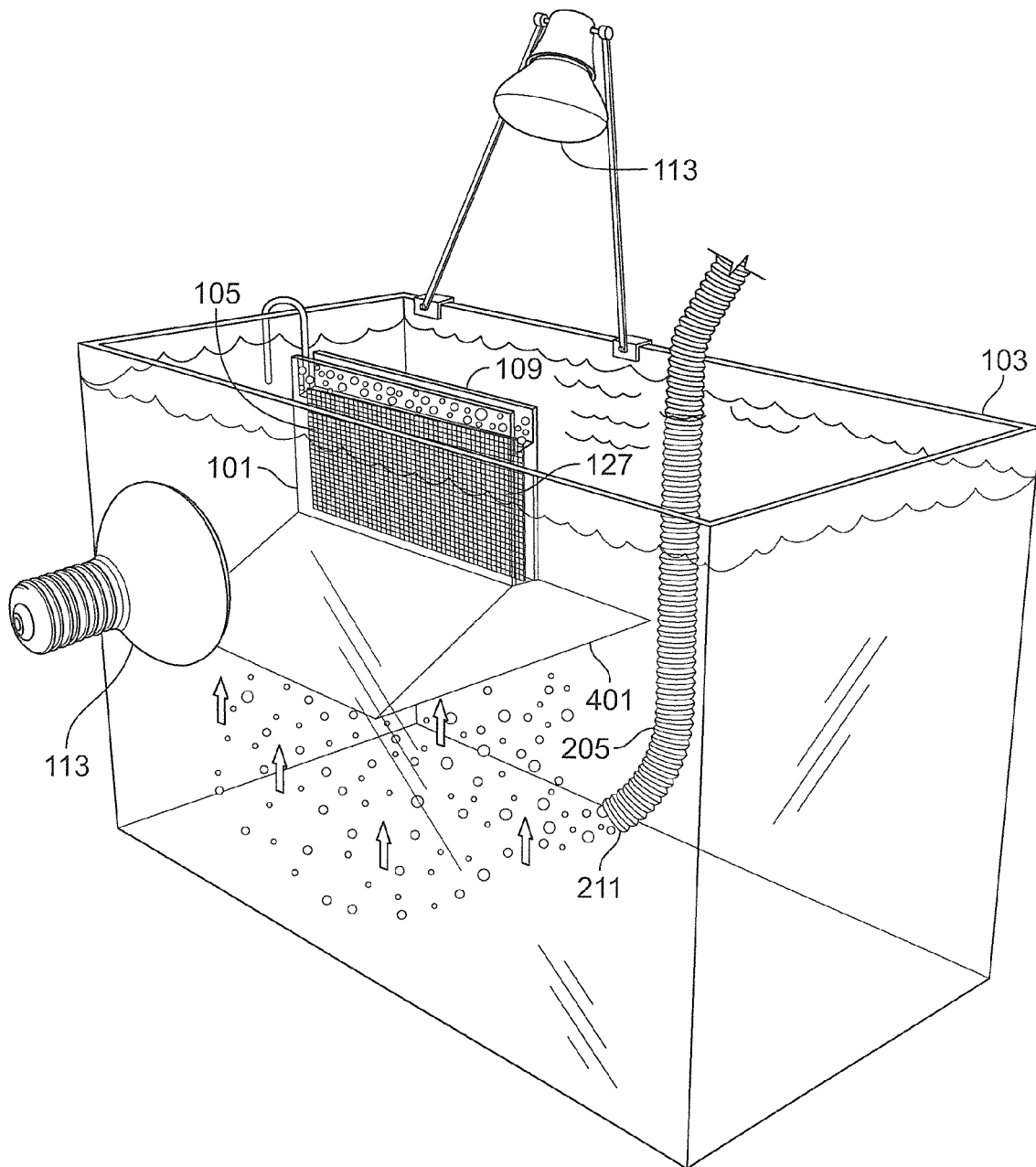


FIG. 4

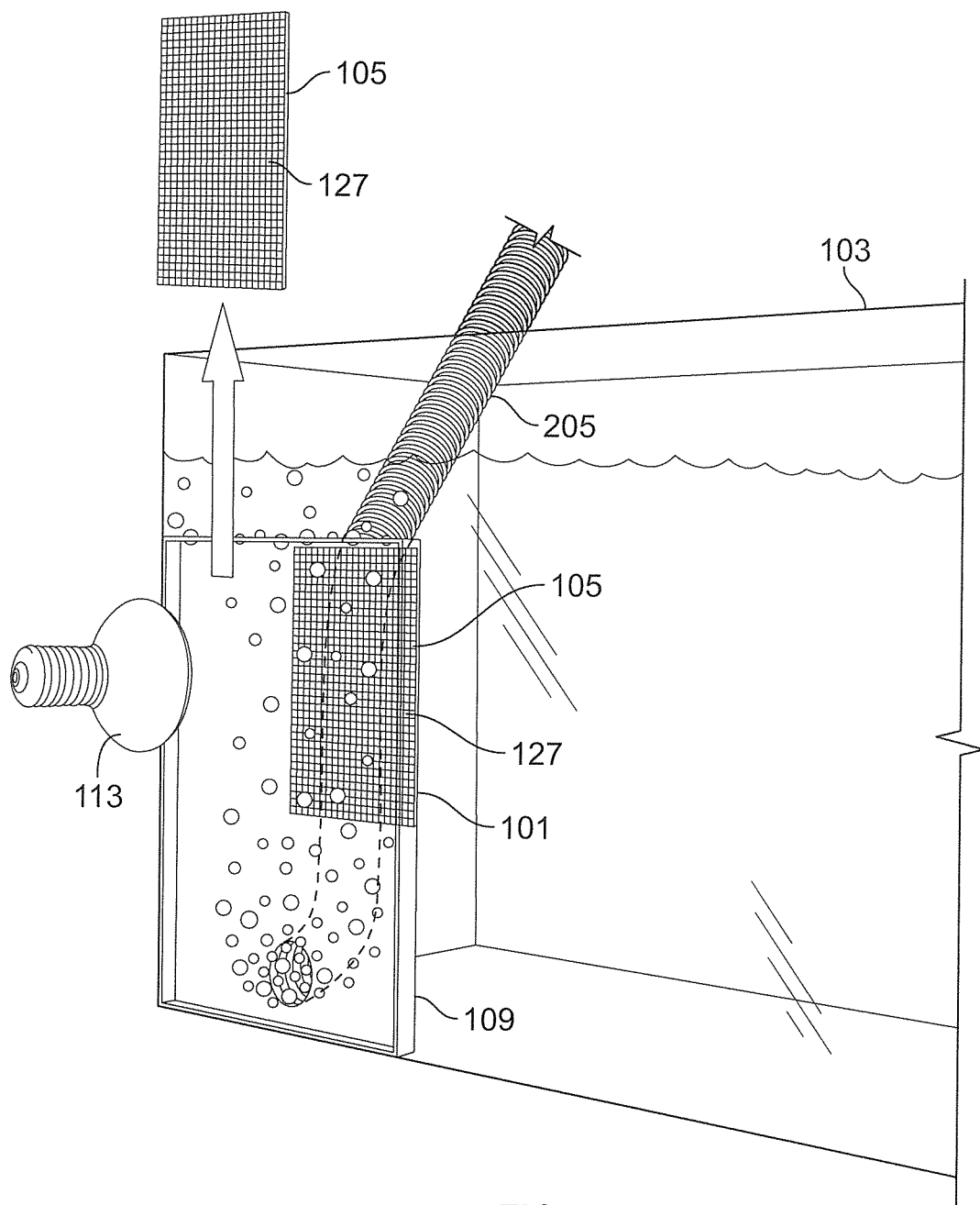


FIG. 5

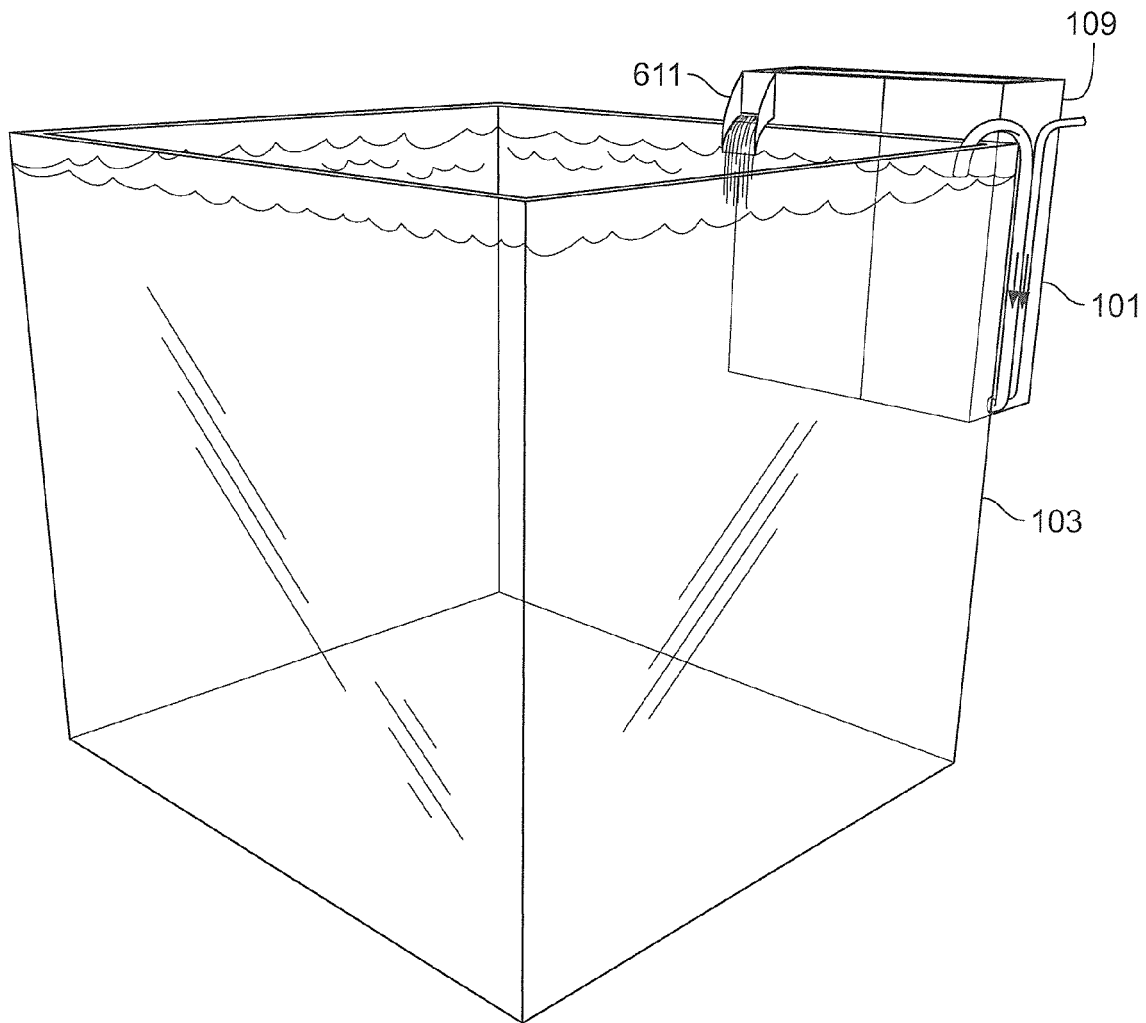


FIG. 6A

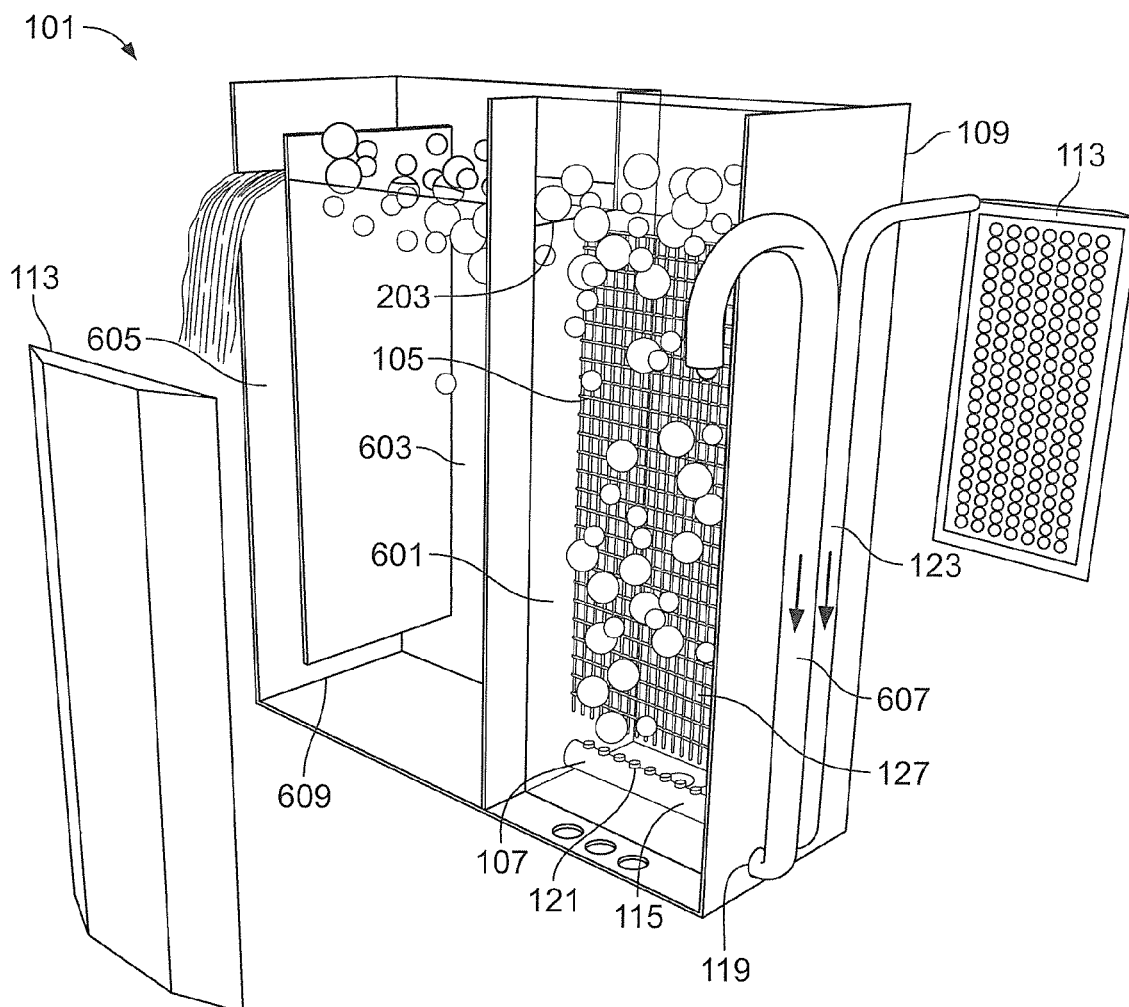


FIG. 6B

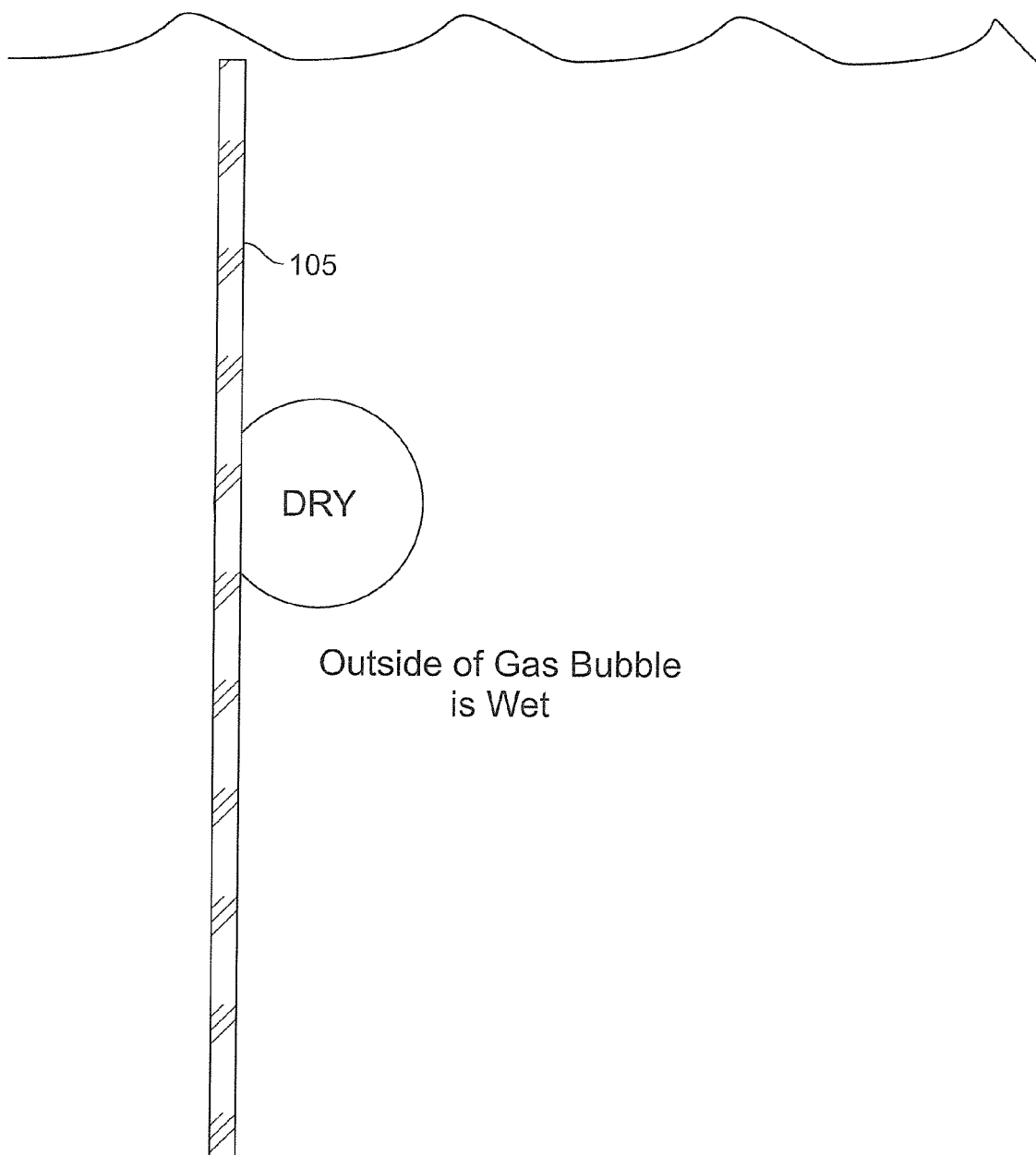


FIG. 7

1

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR UPFLOW ALGAE SCRUBBER, MACROALGAL PHOTOBIOREACTOR AND SEAWEED CULTIVATOR

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. §119 (e) of PCT Application No. PCT/US2012/031714 filed Mar. 30, 2012 which claims priority to, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/591,975 filed Jan. 29, 2012, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/485,560, filed May 12, 2011, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/490,820, filed May 27, 2011, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/554,455, filed Nov. 1, 2011, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/569,195, filed Dec. 9, 2011, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/569,211, filed Jan. 14, 2012, and U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/570,462, filed Dec. 14, 2011.

FIELD

An embodiment of the invention generally relates to an upflow algae scrubber that filters water of nutrients and promotes controlled growth of algal biomass in an efficient manner. Other embodiments are also described.

BACKGROUND

Many industries such as aquaria, aquaculture, wastewater, and pools and spas rely on “clean” water for their proper operation. In these industries, “clean” is defined as water that is low in nutrients (e.g. Inorganic Nitrates, Inorganic Phosphates, Nitrites, Ammonia, Ammonium, and metals such as Copper). These nutrients cause problems in water such as excessive algae and bacteria growth, and in some cases, poisoning of livestock. In these instances, algae disperse in the water in an uncontrolled manner thereby making algae removal difficult. Thus, in these industries there is a desire to remove nutrients and associated algae from the water to maintain “clean” water.

Despite the desire to remove nutrients and algae from water for certain applications, many industries rely on the presence of nutrients in the water for success. For example, food and biofuel industries grow algal biomass to produce their final products. This algal biomass requires a constant supply of nutrients to grow. Thus, there is a need for an algae scrubber that both filters the water of nutrients to provide clean water and promotes controlled growth of algal biomass such that the algae can be easily and efficiently harvested or otherwise removed from the water.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The embodiments of the invention are illustrated by way of example and not by way of limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings in which like references indicate similar elements. It should be noted that references to “an” or “one” embodiment of the invention in this disclosure are not necessarily to the same embodiment, and they mean at least one.

FIG. 1 shows one embodiment of an algae scrubber sitting at the bottom of a container of water for streaming water and gas bubbles upward onto a macroalgal attachment component.

2

FIG. 2 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber coupled to the side of the container for streaming water and gas bubbles downward onto the macroalgal attachment component.

FIG. 3 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber with a collector to guide gas bubbles from the housing onto the macroalgal attachment component.

FIG. 4 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber with an open collector for collecting gas bubbles as they rise in the container and directing the gas bubbles onto the macroalgal attachment component.

FIG. 5 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber with multiple removable macroalgal attachment components.

FIGS. 6A and 6B show embodiments of the algae scrubber hanging on the back of a container.

FIG. 7 shows the macroalgal attachment component submerged in water with a gas bubble rubbing up against the macroalgal attachment component.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Several embodiments of the invention with reference to the appended drawings are now explained. Whenever the shapes, relative positions and other aspects of the parts described in the embodiments are not clearly defined, the scope of the invention is not limited only to the parts shown, which are meant merely for the purpose of illustration. Also, while numerous details are set forth, it is understood that some embodiments of the invention may be practiced without these details. In other instances, well-known circuits, structures, and techniques have not been shown in detail so as not to obscure the understanding of this description.

In the process of filtering water, the challenge has been how to grow algae easily so the algae can be removed or harvested, thus removing the nutrients from the water. If the algae are not removed, they will simply die and put the nutrients back into the water. For biomass growth and production, the challenge has been how to grow enough biomass, in a small space, cheaply.

Algae, either for filtering or for production, fall into two main algae categories: uni-cellular and multi-cellular. Uni-cellular algae are microscopic organisms which drift freely in the water (e.g. plankton) and give the water a usually green tint. Thus, uni-cellular algae are usually called “micro” algae or “phyto” plankton.

Multi-cellular algae are seaweeds that usually attach themselves to a surface. Since multi-cellular seaweeds are much larger than microalgae, they are usually called “macro” algae. It is these multi-cellular attached macroalgae seaweeds that are the focus of several of the embodiments of the algae scrubber described herein.

Algal filtering and production in the 1960’s and 1970’s used mainly attached macroalgae, but in the 1980’s and 1990’s more was being explored about using planktonic microalgae. Microalgae have many advantages including higher growth rates, so in the 2000’s virtually all algal production devices used this form of algae. For harvesting, devices that separate the planktonic microalgae from the water are becoming less costly. For circulation to ensure microalgae remains mixed in the water, air bubbles from a sparger are used. However, the bubbles need to be tiny and travel at a low velocity to reduce shear-stress and breakage to the algal cells.

In freshwater aquariums, filtering devices typically reduce the amount of air in the water and as aquariums become larger

and more complex, more effort is being placed on keeping air bubbles out of the water. Bubble aerators are only used in very small freshwater aquariums.

In saltwater aquariums, bubble aerators are not used at all because the bubbles irritate coral and fish and the bubbles cause "salt spray" at the surface, which covers nearby objects with salt. Successful saltwater tanks with substantial growth of coral, fish and invertebrates use large numbers of non-algal filtration units. Reacting to these results, algal filtration units were discontinued for sale in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

Despite research that discourages growing solid attached macroalgae in the proximity of gas bubbles, allowing gas bubbles to flow rapidly in an "airlift" fashion along a rough surface (e.g. a screen), promotes the growth of solidly attached macroalgae that rapidly consume virtually all pertinent nutrients from the water. Additionally, growing macroalgae on a rough surface with the assistance of gas bubbles eliminates the need to "separate" planktonic algae from the water during harvesting as the algae to be harvested is firmly attached to the rough surface.

Moreover, rapid flow and large bubble size do not impinge on macroalgal growth. Namely, the larger and more rapid the gas bubble flow, the more the algal strands are moved about, thus allowing more water and light to penetrate within their strands. Additionally, bubbles in an aquarium can be eliminated with the assistance of bubble-remover attachments after they have traversed algal growth such that they do not interfere with other aspects of the aquarium.

As described in more detail below, an algae scrubber that uses an "airlift" process to move water over a macroalgal growth surface provides several advantages for aquaria, bio-fuel and/or food production, including:

1. Eliminating the need for a drain that can often become clogged;
2. Eliminate the need of a water pump, which may harm small organisms and can also become clogged;
3. Eliminate the need of a separator to harvest algae particles from the water;
4. Eliminate the need for a sump as water does not have to leave the aquarium;
5. The algae scrubber cannot dry out or get dry spots, even during complete power failures;
6. The algae scrubber will never smell worse than the water itself, since it is always under water;
7. The algae scrubber's air pump can be placed at a remote distance away without risk of coming into contact with water;
8. The algae scrubber can grow for an extended period of time compared to waterfall algae scrubbers that matt-down due to gravity;
9. The algae scrubber cannot grow out of the water into the air; and
10. The algae scrubber cannot splash water, since there is no waterfall emptying onto the surface, and also since there is no waterfall "spray bar" that sometimes sprays water sideways.

Further, using an "airlift" algae scrubber as an enclosed macroalgal photobioreactor, or as an open pond grow-fence seaweed cultivator, provides similar advantages to using the algae scrubber in aquaria. In particular, when used as a grow-fence, production growth and total production are increased compared to horizontal growth layouts, because horizontal designs generate growth on the surface that block light from reaching deeper down algal strands. Vertical airlift grow-fences keep the growth attached to the fence allowing light to penetrate deep into the water. This allows the fences to be stacked together to increase the biomass that can be grown per acre.

FIG. 1 shows one embodiment of an algae scrubber **101** sitting at the bottom of a container of water **103**. Although the container **103** shown in FIG. 1 is an aquarium, container **103** can be any vessel capable for holding water. For example, container **103** may be a swimming pool, a spa, a lake, an ocean, a reservoir, etc.

The algae scrubber **101** includes a macroalgal attachment component **105**, a bubbling component **107**, a compartment **109**, an attachment mechanism **111**, and a light source **113**. Each of these elements will be described by way of example below.

The bubbling component **107** is a device for producing gas bubbles in a liquid. For example, the bubbling component **107** may be an airstone or aquarium bubbler. In one embodiment, the bubbling component **107** includes a housing **115** and a coupling mechanism **117**. The housing **115** defines a gas inlet **119** for receiving a flow of gas and a set of gas bubble ports **121** for releasing the gas into the container **103**. The gas inlet **119** may receive gas through a pipe or tube **123** coupled to the gas inlet **119**. In one embodiment, a tube couples an external pump or compressor **125** to the gas inlet **119**. Gas produced by the external pump **125** travels through the tube **123** into the gas inlet **119**. Upon entering the gas inlet **119**, the gas is exposed to the gas bubble ports **121** and is allowed to escape into the container **103** through the gas bubble ports **121** to form gas bubbles in the water of the container **103**. In one embodiment, the gas bubble ports **121** are holes through the housing **115** that expose the gas inlet **119** to the container **103**. The gas bubble ports **121** may be uniformly spaced along multiple rows on the housing **115** or randomly placed on the housing **115**. In one embodiment, the gas bubble ports for use in aquaria are spaced 10 mm apart, but can be spaced between 5 mm and 20 mm apart while for seaweed cultivators the gas bubble ports may be spaced between 50 mm and 200 mm apart. In one embodiment, in an aquarium the bubbling component **107** emits 0.01-1.0 liters/minute per lineal inch of the bubbling component **107**. For seaweed cultivation and other uses, the rate of gas flow through the bubbling component would be higher.

Macroalgal attachment component **105** is a screen or rigid mesh with at least one surface **127** for growing algae. In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is a rectangular plastic screen that provides a rough structure for growing algae. Although described as being formed of plastic, the macroalgal attachment component **105** may be composed of any non-corrosive material. As described herein, the surface **127** may be one side of the macroalgal attachment component **105** or a section of one side of the macroalgal attachment component **105**. The macroalgal attachment component **105** and corresponding surface **127** should be as thin as possible and transparent to maximize the amount of light that reaches the roots of algal growth. In some embodiments, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is between 5-50 cm wide, 5-100 cm tall, and 1-10 mm thick. For example, in one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is 25 cm wide, 50 cm tall, and 5 mm thick.

The coupling mechanism **117** couples the macroalgal attachment component **105** to the bubbling component **107**. Although shown as separate from the bubbling component **107**, in one embodiment the macroalgal attachment component **105** and the bubbling component **107** are a single indivisible unit. In this embodiment, the bubbling component **117** does not include the coupling mechanism **117**.

The coupling mechanism **117** may be one or more clamps, screws, bolts, latches, weights, or similar devices that are capable of releasably coupling the macroalgal attachment component **105** to the bubbling component **107**. Releasably

coupling is defined as a connection that is configured to be released by a user without the assistance of external tools and without damage to the components, including the coupling mechanism 117, the bubbling component 107, the macroalgal attachment component 105, or other components of the algae scrubber 101. In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment component 105 is decoupled from the bubbling component 107 such that algae growing on the macroalgal attachment component 105 can be harvested. As shown in FIG. 1, the coupling mechanism 117 is a set of weights that anchor the macroalgal attachment component 105 to the bubbling component 107. The coupling mechanism 117 aligns the surface 127 of the macroalgal attachment component 105 with one or more of the gas bubble ports 121. In one embodiment, an entire row of gas bubble ports 121 are aligned with the entire length of the surface 127. By aligning the gas bubble ports 121 with the surface 127 of the macroalgal attachment component 105, bubbles emitted by the gas bubble ports 121 are directed to travel along the surface 127 and come into direct contact with the surface 127.

By allowing gas bubbles to flow rapidly in an "airlift" fashion along the rough surface 127, solidly attached macroalgal growth will be formed on the macroalgal attachment component 105. The larger and more rapid the bubble flow, the better the algal strands are moved about, thus allowing more water and light to penetrate within the strands. This algal growth will rapidly consume virtually all pertinent nutrients from the water. Further, since the algae are attached to the macroalgal attachment component 105, there will not be a need to separate any planktonic algae from the water when the algae are harvested. To further increase algal growth, the gas bubbles may include CO₂ to provide even more carbon for the algae to consume.

In one embodiment, the compartment 109 surrounds the bubbling component 107 and the macroalgal attachment component 105. The compartment 109 may be formed of a translucent material that allows the passage of light to reach the surface 127 and corresponding algal growth. For example, the compartment 109 may be made of a clear plastic or glass material. Both gas bubbles and water are allowed into the compartment 109 either through the inlet 119 or a separate opening in the compartment 109 that exposes the interior of the compartment 109 to the water in the container 103. In one embodiment, an opening at the bottom of the compartment 109 allows water to enter the compartment 109 while gas enters through the inlet 119. As algal growth on the surface 127 is formed, gas bubbles will naturally be forced away by the strands of algal growth protruding from the surface 127. The compartment 109 ensures that the gas bubbles remain close and come into direct contact with the surface 127 by providing a barrier or guide. The compartment 109 is open on one side to allow the gas bubbles to escape the compartment 109 after they have traversed the surface 127. The opening on one side of the compartment 109 also allows for easy removal of the macroalgal attachment component 105 for harvesting.

The compartment 109 is sized to fit around the macroalgal attachment component 105. In some embodiments, the compartment 109 is between 5-50 cm wide, 5-100 cm tall, and 10-150 mm thick. For example, in one embodiment, the compartment 109 is 30 cm wide, 60 cm tall, and 30 mm thick. In one embodiment, the compartment 109 is positioned 20 mm away from the surface 127. By positioning the compartment 109 20 mm away, algal growth on the surface 127 will not grow thicker than 20 mm. Thus, the growth will rarely if ever block light from reaching the roots of the algal growth, which will prevent the growth from dying and detaching from the surface 127. In other embodiments, the compartment 109 is

positioned between 5-30 mm from the surface 127 to promote the growth of smaller or larger algae strands. In one embodiment, the algae scrubber 101 does not include a compartment 109 and the surface 127 of the macroalgal attachment component 105 is directly exposed to the water in the container 103.

In some embodiments, the algae scrubber 101 is used in containers 103 with livestock. In these embodiments, algae are allowed to overgrow and detach from the surface 127. For example, in embodiments of the algae scrubber 101 that do not include the compartment 109 or in which the compartment 109 is open on one or more ends, algae may escape and float in the container 103. The algae will eventually flow into the livestock area and will thus be available for eating by herbivores.

After a desired level of growth has been reached, the solid algae on the surface 127 is removed (harvested) such that the nutrients are removed from the system and the algal growth can be used by food, aquaculture and/or biofuel industries. This is accomplished by removing the macroalgal attachment component 105 from the compartment 109 and scraping the algae off the surface 127. The macroalgal attachment component 105 is then replaced back into the compartment 109 to allow further algae to grow. This cleaning/harvesting may be performed manually by a user or by using an automated harvesting device that operates at predetermined intervals or in response to a triggering event.

In some embodiments, the bubbling component 107 grows algae on the housing 115. In these embodiments, the bubbling component 107 and the macroalgal attachment component 105 are a single, unified unit.

In some embodiments, the gas produced by the external pump or compressor 125 and received by the gas inlet 119 is pulsed or repeatedly turned on and off. This provides a periodic surge of flow back into the container 103, which may benefit certain livestock and reduce aeration costs. By using air pumps instead of water pumps, the algae scrubber 101 is more easily pulsed since air pumps are easily turned on and off, whereas water pumps are not, because they often need to be primed before each restart.

The compartment 109 is coupled to the container 103 with the attachment mechanism 111. The attachment mechanism 111 may be one or more clamps, screws, bolts, latches, or similar devices that are capable of coupling the compartment 109 to the container 103. In FIG. 1, the attachment mechanism 111 couples the compartment 109 to the bottom of the container 103. In other embodiments, the attachment mechanism 111 couples the compartment 109 to a side wall or ceiling of the container 103. In some embodiments, the algae scrubber 101 does not include an attachment mechanism 111. In these embodiments, the algae scrubber 101 rests on the floor of the container 103, leans against the side of the container 103, or floats in the water of the container 103.

In one embodiment, algae scrubber 101 may include a light source 113. The light source 113 is directed at the surface 127 of the macroalgal attachment component 105. Although shown in FIG. 1 as an artificial light (i.e. an electric light bulb), the light source 113 may be supplied by natural or artificial means. Natural lighting would include redirected light from the sun via mirrors, metal conduits or fiber optics, whereas artificial lighting would include all manner of electric bulbs, light emitting diodes, or other light-emitting devices. Using either natural or artificial light, the light source 113 could be directly coupled to the algae scrubber 101 or part of a separate device. In some embodiments, reflectors 129 are provided to surround the macroalgal attachment component 105 to increase the illumination of the surface 127 and pro-

mote algal growth. The reflectors **129** are made or are coated with reflective materials and reflect or redirect light from the light source **113** toward the algae growing on the surface **127**.

FIG. 2 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber **101** coupled to the side of the container **103** with attachment mechanisms **111**. In this embodiment water and gas bubbles are streamed through a gas flow guide **201** downward onto the macroalgal attachment component **105**. The gas flow guide **201** may be comprised of a housing **205** and a coupling mechanism **209**. In one embodiment, the housing **205** is a hose that streams water and gas bubbles over the macroalgal attachment component **105** from a gas inlet **211**. The housing **205** may be coupled to a dedicated water pump (e.g. a sump pump), water overflow from a filtration system, or a similar device for pumping water. The gas bubbles may be naturally occurring in the water as a result of the turbulence caused by the pumping and movement of the water or artificially introduced by pumping gas into the water stream. For example, CO₂ may be pumped into the water stream from an external source. In some embodiments, CO₂ is captured from industrial processes and pumped into the water.

The coupling mechanism **209** secures the macroalgal attachment component **105** to the gas flow guide **201**. The coupling mechanism **209** may be one or more clamps, screws, bolts, latches, or similar devices that are capable of coupling the macroalgal attachment component **105** to the gas flow guide **201**. As shown in FIG. 2, the coupling mechanism **209** is a brace that secures the gas flow guide **201** to a top portion of the compartment **109**. The coupling mechanism **209** aligns the surface **127** of the macroalgal attachment component **105** with the gas flow guide **201**. In one embodiment, the gas flow guide **201** does not include the coupling mechanism **209**. In this embodiment, the gas flow guide **201** is not coupled to the compartment **109**, but is aimed at the macroalgal attachment component **105**.

In the embodiment of FIG. 2, water and gas bubbles pour from the housing **205** down the surface **127** and circulate back up the surface **127** by the force of a constant down pouring of water and gas bubbles. The compartment **109** includes overflow slots **203** on multiple sides to allow the water and gas bubbles to escape into the container **103** after they have circulated and contacted the surface **127**. In some embodiments, the compartment **109** does not include overflow slots **203**.

In one embodiment, one or more diffractors **207** are coupled to the surface **127**. The diffractors **207** are small blocks that diffract the movement of water and gas bubbles over various sections of the surface **127**. In this way, the gas bubbles are not primarily focused on one section of the surface **127** while neglecting other sections. Allowing gas bubbles to come into contact with various sections of the surface **127** provides a more uniform level of algal growth across the surface **127** and maximizes the growth of algae before harvesting must be performed. In some embodiments, the diffractors **207** are between 5-50 mm wide, 5-50 mm tall, and 5-50 mm thick. For example, in one embodiment, the diffractors **207** are 20 mm wide, 20 mm tall, and 20 mm thick.

FIG. 3 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber **101** with a collector **301** to guide gas bubbles from the housing **205** onto the surface **127**. The collector **301** receives a stream of water and gas bubbles from the housing **205** and distributes the water and gas bubbles over various sections of the surface **127**. In one embodiment, the collector **301** may be defined by an enclosure that is tapered at a first end coupled to the housing **205** and expanded at a second end coupled to the surface **127**. In one embodiment, the second end includes one or more funnels for directing the stream of water gas bubbles to separate sections of the surface **127**.

In one embodiment, a venturi valve **303** is used to introduce gas bubbles to the water stream. The venturi valve **303** uses the Bernoulli principle of air injection. A stream of highly pressurized water is injected through the housing **205** which is restricted at one end. As it exits the restriction, an opening **305** that is adjacent to the output of the restriction causes a pressure differential to occur. This has the effect of dragging air along with the stream of water producing many tiny gas bubbles. The venturi valve **303** may introduce gas bubbles to the water stream without supplemental addition of air from an externally powered source.

FIG. 4 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber **101** with an open collector **401**. The open collector **401** is defined by a wide opening on a first side for collecting gas bubbles in the container **103** and a narrower opening on a second side for directing the collected gas bubbles to the surface **127** of the macroalgal attachment component **105**. In this embodiment, the bottom of the compartment **109** is open and is coupled to the narrow opening of the open collector **401**. The housing **205** is inserted directly into the water of the container **103** through which a stream of water and/or gas bubbles are released into the container **103**. The wide opening of the open collector **401** is directed downwards to collect gas bubbles as they rise in the container **109**. The gas bubbles are directed by the open collector **401** through the narrower opening to the surface **127** of the macroalgal attachment component **105**. The gas bubbles continue to rise as they come into contact with the surface **127** and are eventually released into the atmosphere upon reaching the top of the container **109**.

As noted above, the open collector **401** is tapered. In some embodiments, the wide opening on the first side for collecting gas bubbles is between 10-50 cm wide and the narrower opening on the second side for directing the collected gas bubbles to the surface **127** is between 10-50 mm thick. For example, the wide opening may be 40 cm and the narrower opening is 30 mm and matches the thickness of the compartment **109**.

In one embodiment, the algae scrubber **101** with the open collector **401** includes a light source **113**. As shown in FIG. 4, the light source **113** is coupled to a top portion of the container **103** and directed downward at the surface **127**. In other embodiments, the light source **113** may be a light emitting diode (LED) array clamped to both sides of the compartment **109** and directed at the surface **127**.

FIG. 5 shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber **101** with multiple macroalgal attachment components **105**. In the algae scrubber **101** with multiple macroalgal attachment components **105** of FIG. 5, the housing **205** is coupled to a bottom portion of the compartment **109**. The housing **205** receives water and/or gas bubbles from an external source and pumps the water and gas bubbles into the compartment **109**. As gas bubbles and water are forced into the compartment **109**, the gas bubbles rise and come into direct contact with the surfaces **127** of the macroalgal attachment components **105**. This direct contact of gas bubbles to the surfaces **127** promotes the growth of algae on the surfaces **127**. In this embodiment, each of the macroalgal attachment components **105** may be individually removed through a top open portion of the compartment **109**. After removal, algal growth on the surface **127** may be harvested and collected. Thereafter, the macroalgal attachment components **105** may be returned to the compartment **109** for further algae to be grown. By locating the algae scrubber **101** in the container **103** as opposed to in a waterfall style external device, algae growing in the algae scrubber **101** may be harvested without turning off the flow of gas bubbles. This eases the method of harvesting and limits overgrowth caused by inattention.

In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is automatically lifted out of the compartment **109** and out of the container **103** and automatically replaced with a fresh macroalgal attachment component **105**. The removed macroalgal attachment component **105** is cleaned and algae are harvested while algae begin to grow on the newly inserted macroalgal attachment component **105**. In some embodiments, the macroalgal attachment component **105** includes a brush parallel to the surface **127**. During removal, the brush of the macroalgal attachment component **105** could be pushed or pressed up against a wall of the compartment **109** or container **103** to brush the wall clear of algal growth which may be blocking the light from the light source **113**.

In one embodiment, the compartment **109** and/or the macroalgal attachment component **105** is capable of pivoting so that the surface **127** is perpendicular to the light source **113** at all times. The pivoting could be performed manually by a user or through an automated technique that tracks the movement of the light source **113**. This automated pivoting is especially applicable when natural light sources (e.g. the Sun) that naturally move are used.

FIG. 6A shows an embodiment of the algae scrubber **101** in which the scrubber **101** hangs on the back of the container **103**. As described below, although the algae scrubber **101** hangs on the back of the container **103** and is outside the water of the container **103**, a macroalgal attachment component **105** located inside the compartment **109** of the algae scrubber **101** is still submerged in water from the container **103** and is exposed to corresponding nutrients in the water.

FIG. 6B shows a cutaway view of the hang on back algae scrubber **101**. The algae scrubber **101** in this embodiment includes a divided compartment **109**. The first division **601** includes the macroalgal attachment component **105** and the bubbling component **107**. The bubbling component **107** is located in a bottom portion of the first division **601** and is faced upwards towards the macroalgal attachment component **105**. The bubbling component **107** receives gas from a tube **123** that is connected to an external gas source such as a gas pump **125**. Gas flowing to the bubbling component **107** is released as gas bubbles into the first division **601** through gas bubble ports **121** in the bubbling component **107**. The surface **127** of the macroalgal attachment component **105** is aligned with the gas bubble ports **121** such that the gas bubbles come into contact and travel along the surface **127**. In one embodiment, one or more light sources **113** surround the macroalgal attachment component **105**. As shown, the light sources **113** are LED arrays. However, the light sources **113** may be any combination of natural or artificial light emitting devices.

As gas is transported through the bubbling component **107**, water is delivered into the first division **601** through a circulation housing **607**. In one embodiment, the circulation housing **607** is a tube that siphons water from the container **103**. The circulation housing **607** may push water through a lower end of the first division **601** such that water flows upward in the first division **601**. As the water circulates upward through the first division **601**, water and gas bubbles spill from an overflow slot **203** and into the second division **603**. Gas bubbles are collected at the top of the second division **603** and explode thereby releasing the corresponding gas through holes in the compartment **109** into the atmosphere. Thereafter, the water may be transferred through a lower gateway **609** to a third division **605** and eventually back into the container **103** through a spout **611**. Since the gas bubbles were allowed to dissipate/explode in the second division **603** before the water is allowed to return to the container **103**, gas bubbles from the bubbling component **107** are not transferred to the water in the container **103**.

As described above, the algae scrubber **101** forces gas bubbles to come into contact and rub against the macroalgal attachment component **105**. This rubbing is necessary to promote algae growth on the macroalgal attachment component **105**. As shown in FIG. 7, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is naturally wet, because it is submerged in water. In contrast, the insides of gas bubbles are dry. Since water does not absorb CO₂ quickly when the macroalgal attachment component **105** is wet, not enough CO₂ gets to the macroalgae growing on the macroalgal attachment component **105** if the component is always wet. However, when the macroalgal attachment component **105** alternates from wet to dry via bubbles rubbing up against the component **105**, CO₂ is delivered directly to macroalgae tissue and much more algae growth takes place.

Although the embodiments of the algae scrubber **101** discussed herein can be used to grow any type of algae, the preferred types of algae are green hairy variations such as derbasia, enteromorpha (ulva), chaetomorpha, and cladophora. These types of algae are preferred, because they are somewhat transparent to light and water flow. These characteristics allow light and water to reach the roots of the algae that are attached to the surface **127**. This penetration keeps roots alive, so that the algae strands do not detach and float away. In one embodiment, especially useful for biofuel production, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is inoculated with a desired species of macroalgae that produces the highest lipid content, gasification or ethanol production. The algae scrubber **101** would then be seeded with a preferred algal species and would ensure the preferred algal species is grown. Although the algae species noted above are preferred, the algae scrubber **101** can be used to grow any type of algae.

As noted above, the algae scrubber **101** may be used in a variety of different containers **103**. In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment component **105** is floated at the surface of a river, lake, ocean, agriculture runoff area, or wastewater containment facility so that the top of the macroalgal attachment component **105** is at the water surface and the bottom of the macroalgal attachment component **105** is deep in the water. The macroalgal attachment component **105** could be rotated into shore by a cable for manual or automatic cleaning/harvesting. In another embodiment, the algae scrubber **101** is used for hobby food/gardening/skin care/beer/wine making at home. In this embodiment, the algae scrubber **101** is fed nutrients from a reservoir to ensure the algae have sufficient resources to grow on the macroalgal attachment component **105**.

In one embodiment, an apparatus **101** for water filtration, comprises a macroalgal attachment means **105** defining a first macroalgal attachment surface **127**; and a bubbling means **107** including, a housing **115** defining a gas inlet **119** and a set of gas bubble ports **121**, and a coupling means **117**, the coupling means **117** to secure the macroalgal attachment means **105** to the bubbling means **107** and to align the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** with the set of gas bubble ports **121** such that a first portion of the gas bubbles to be produced by the gas bubble ports **121** are directed to travel along the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface **127**.

In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment means further defines a second macroalgal attachment surface **127**, such that a second portion of the gas bubbles to be produced by the set of gas bubble ports **121** are directed to travel along the second macroalgal attachment surface **127** in contact with the second macroalgal attachment surface **127**.

In one embodiment, the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** is defined by a screen.

11

In one embodiment, the apparatus **101** further comprises: a compartment **109** within which the macroalgal attachment means **105** and the bubbling means **107** are disposed; and an attachment mechanism **111** to couple the compartment **109** to a container **103** for liquid.

In one embodiment, the apparatus **101** further comprises: a light source **113** coupled to the compartment **109**, the light source **113** to illuminate the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** to facilitate macroalgal growth.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is an aquarium.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is a swimming pool.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is a natural water reservoir.

In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment means **(105)** is releasably coupled to the bubbling means **(107)** to allow the macroalgal attachment means **(105)** to be removed from the compartment **(109)** and enable algae to be harvested.

In one embodiment, an apparatus **101** for water filtration, comprises: a macroalgal attachment means **105** defining a first macroalgal attachment surface **127**; and a gas flow guide means **201** including, a housing **205** defining a gas inlet **211**, and a coupling means **209**, the coupling means **209** to secure the macroalgal attachment means **105** to the gas flow guide means **201** and to align the macroalgal attachment surface **127** with a flow of gas bubbles from the gas inlet **211** such that a first portion of the gas bubbles to be received by the gas inlet **211** are directed to travel along the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface **127**.

In one embodiment, the gas flow guide means **201** further includes a set of diffractors **207** that disperse the first portion of gas bubbles along the first macroalgal attachment surface **127**.

In one embodiment, the gas flow guide means **201** further includes a venturi valve **303** for producing the gas bubbles.

In one embodiment, the apparatus **101** further comprises: a compartment **109** within which the macroalgal attachment means **105** and the gas flow guide means **201** are disposed; and an attachment mechanism **111** to couple the compartment **109** to a container **103** for liquid.

In one embodiment, the apparatus **101** further comprises: a light source **113** coupled to the housing **205**, the light source **113** to illuminate the first macroalgal attachment surface **127** to facilitate macroalgal growth.

In one embodiment, the apparatus **101** further comprises: a collector **301**, **401** to guide gas flow from the gas inlet **211** onto the first macroalgal attachment surface **127**.

In one embodiment, the collector **301** defines a set of nozzles to shape the gas flow within the gas flow guide **201**.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is an aquarium.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is a swimming pool.

In one embodiment, the container **103** is a natural water reservoir.

In one embodiment, the macroalgal attachment means **(105)** is releasably coupled to the gas flow guide means **(201)** to allow the macroalgal attachment means **(105)** to be removed from the compartment **(109)** and enable algae to be harvested.

In one embodiment, an apparatus **(101)** for water filtration, comprises: a macroalgal attachment means **(105)** defining a first macroalgal attachment surface **(127)**; a compartment **(109)** that defines a gas flow passage **(601)** within which the macroalgal attachment means **(105)** is disposed; and a bubbling means **(107)** including, a housing **(115)** defining a gas inlet **(119)** and a set of gas bubble ports **(121)**, the macroalgal attachment surface **(127)** is aligned with the set of gas bubble ports **(121)** such that a first portion of gas bubbles to be

12

produced by the gas bubble ports **(121)** are directed to travel along the first macroalgal attachment surface **(127)** in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface **(127)**.

While certain embodiments have been described and shown in the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that such embodiments are merely illustrative of and not restrictive on the broad invention, and that the invention is not limited to the specific constructions and arrangements shown and described, since various other modifications may occur to those of ordinary skill in the art. The description is thus to be regarded as illustrative instead of limiting.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for water filtration, comprising:

a macroalgal attachment component defining a first macroalgal attachment surface; and

a bubbling component including,

a housing defining a gas inlet and a set of gas bubble ports, and

a coupling mechanism, the coupling mechanism to secure the macroalgal attachment component to the bubbling component and to align the first macroalgal attachment surface with the set of gas bubble ports such that a first portion of the gas bubbles to be produced by the gas bubble ports is directed to travel upward along the first macroalgal attachment surface in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface such that macroalgal growth attached to the first macroalgal attachment surface passes through an interior dry portion of the upflowing gas bubbles.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the macroalgal attachment component further defines a second macroalgal attachment surface, such that a second portion of the gas bubbles to be produced by the set of gas bubble ports is directed to travel upward along the second macroalgal attachment surface in contact with the second macroalgal attachment surface such that macroalgal growth attached to the second macroalgal attachment surface passes through an interior dry portion of the upflowing gas bubbles.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first macroalgal attachment surface is defined by a screen.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

a compartment within which the macroalgal attachment component and the bubbling component are disposed; and

an attachment mechanism to couple the compartment to a container for liquid.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising:

a light source coupled to the compartment, the light source to illuminate the first macroalgal attachment surface to facilitate macroalgal growth.

6. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the container is an aquarium.

7. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the container is a swimming pool.

8. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the container is a natural water reservoir.

9. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the macroalgal attachment component is releasably coupled to the bubbling component to allow the macroalgal attachment component to be removed from the compartment and enable algae to be harvested.

10. An apparatus for water filtration, comprising:

a macroalgal attachment component defining a first macroalgal attachment surface; and

a gas flow guide component including, a housing defining a gas inlet, and

13

- a coupling mechanism, the coupling mechanism to secure the macroalgal attachment component to the gas flow guide component and to align the macroalgal attachment surface with a flow of gas bubbles flowing upwards as a result of the gas from the gas inlet such that a first portion of the gas bubbles to be received by the gas inlet is directed to travel upwards along the first macroalgal attachment surface in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface such that macroalgal growth attached to the first macroalgal attachment surface passes through an interior dry portion of the upflowing gas bubbles.
11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the gas flow guide component further includes a set of diffractors that disperse the first portion of gas bubbles.
12. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the gas flow guide component further includes a venturi valve for producing the gas bubbles.
13. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the first macroalgal attachment surface is defined by a screen.
14. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising:
a light source coupled to the compartment, the light source to illuminate the first macroalgal attachment surface to facilitate macroalgal growth.
15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the gas inlet defines a set of nozzles to shape the gas flow within the gas flow guide.
16. The apparatus of claim 10, further comprising:
a compartment within which the macroalgal attachment component and the gas flow guide component are disposed; and
an attachment mechanism to couple the compartment to a container for liquid.
17. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the container is an aquarium.

14

18. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the container is a swimming pool.
19. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the container is a natural water reservoir.
20. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the macroalgal attachment component is releasably coupled to the gas flow guide component to allow the macroalgal attachment component to be removed from the compartment and enable algae to be harvested.
21. The apparatus of claim 10, further comprising:
a collector to guide gas flow into the gas inlet, such that the resulting upward flowing gas bubbles make direct contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface.
22. An apparatus for aquarium water filtration, comprising:
a macroalgal attachment component defining a first macroalgal attachment surface;
a gas flow guide component coupled to the macroalgal attachment component having a housing that defines a gas flow passage and an interior chamber within which the macroalgal attachment component is disposed; and
a bubbling component including,
a housing defining a gas inlet and a set of gas bubble ports, and
a coupling mechanism, the coupling mechanism to secure the macroalgal attachment component to the bubbling component and to align the macroalgal attachment surface with the set of gas bubble ports such that a first portion of gas bubbles to be produced by the gas bubble ports is directed to travel upwards along the first macroalgal attachment surface in contact with the first macroalgal attachment surface such that macroalgal growth attached to the first macroalgal attachment surface passes through an interior dry portion of the upflowing gas bubbles.

* * * * *