



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cooke Aquaculture Pacific advocating to save rural salmon farming jobs

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(OLYMPIA, Washington) – Cooke Aquaculture Pacific will testify in opposition to legislation proposing a ban on its Washington salmon farming operations at a public hearing in the Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Committee at 1:30 pm on Tuesday, January 9.

“The incident at our Cypress Island farm over the summer was certainly regrettable, and we are doing all we can as a company to take responsibility and address it,” said Joel Richardson, Vice President of Public Relations for Cooke Aquaculture, referencing an infrastructure failure in late August that resulted in the release of farmed Atlantic salmon into Puget Sound.

“We acknowledge that the fish escapement prompted some understandable fears and concerns about the impact of Atlantic salmon on the health of native stocks, but we are urging lawmakers to recognize that these fears are not borne out by the history or the best available science.”

All fish recovered from the incident have empty stomachs, since they, as domesticated stock, have not developed the instinct to forage and compete with native stock for food. They are not sexually mature and cannot reproduce in the wild. All farmed salmon in Washington receive the same screening for pathogens and are subject to the same disease preventative measures as hatchery-raised salmon. In addition, over 8 million Atlantic salmon have been released intentionally by government agencies in Canada and the United States over the past century to try and establish Atlantic salmon on the West Coast, and all of those efforts have failed.

“Rushing to ban a legal business operation that provides a sustainable and affordable source of locally-grown protein, represents tens of millions of dollars of investment in the state and has provided good, family-wage jobs in rural Puget Sound for over 30 years would be a draconian response and a very unfortunate mistake,” said Richardson.

“We hope that, where salmon farming is concerned, the Legislature will place the same premium on basing policy decisions on sound science as it does on issues of climate change and ocean acidification.”

Senate Bill 6086, sponsored by Sen. Kevin Ranker, would effectively end the ability of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific, the sole commercial salmon farming company permitted to operate in Puget Sound, to continue its existing operations, which currently employ over 80 individuals directly and supports 100 more workers on harvesting boats and in processing plants, representing an investment valued at more than \$70 million into Washington’s economy, with plans for additional multi-million-dollar capital investments. In the past, Ranker has denounced what he has characterized as a prioritization of stakeholder interests over sound science.

Richardson said Cooke Aquaculture Pacific is supportive of other legislative approaches to this issue, which include a review of all existing aquaculture regulations, regular inspections of net-pen facilities, and a local academic study of net-pen aquaculture and its impacts on the ecology.

“We are prepared to put forth suggestions for best regulatory practices that have worked in other states like Maine and in locations all around the world,” said Richardson.

“Cooke has offered to help fund a scientific review of net pen aquaculture and the impacts of accidental escapes. And Cooke is willing to explore ways to help the State improve native fish runs and augment state and tribal hatchery operations. We’ve been in Washington state for a little over a year now, but our company is one of the best in the world when it comes to both, and we want to share our experience and expertise to ensure that Puget Sound waters continue to have fish for tribes and commercial fisheries to fish for generations to come.”

Richardson said banning Cooke’s ability to continue its operations forecloses these possibilities.

In the summer of 2016, Cooke Aquaculture acquired the four salmon farming facilities in Puget Sound that have been in operation for over thirty years – at Port Angeles, Hope Island, Cypress Island and Rich Passage – and include current employees who have worked at the facilities for decades.

Employees from these facilities will also be on hand to present their testimony at Tuesday’s hearing.

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