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## **Cooke Aquaculture Pacific employees praise compromise bill to keep them employed, address tribal concerns**

**(OLYMPIA, Washington)** Cooke Aquaculture Pacific employees today testified in enthusiastic support of legislation they say represents a “third way” for current legislative discussions about the future of net-pen aquaculture, allowing them to remain employed while addressing Native American tribal concerns about farmed Atlantic salmon colonization among native fish populations.

“Studies, risk analysis and history have shown farmed Atlantic salmon pose little risk to Pacific salmon through cross breeding or competition,” said Kevin Bright, permit coordinator for Cooke Aquaculture Pacific. “But we also recognize the deep concerns about potential impact of non-native species on native stocks. We respect the Northwest treaty tribes’ heritage and their rights to harvest fish in their usual and accustomed waters. And we respect the fact that tribal fishing programs are turning to aquaculture – including net-pen aquaculture – as a means of augmenting declining fish populations. This bill strikes the absolute right balance between addressing tribal concerns about non-native salmon, while ensuring that net-pen aquaculture remains a viable farming practice – both for tribes and commercial farming enterprises.”

House Bill 2956 was heard today in the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee. The bill’s sponsor, Rep. Brian Blake, D-Aberdeen, noted that, while Washington state agencies have introduced millions of Atlantic salmon into the Puget Sound without any instance of colonization between farmed and native salmon, Blake wanted to provide additional assurance for those concerned that it could still occur. To mitigate any risk of colonization, Blake’s proposal would require all future salmon farming leases awarded by the state to be limited to the production of single-sex fish that cannot reproduce.

Cooke Aquaculture Pacific employees expressed their confidence in raising exclusively female Atlantic salmon by the time the bill requires and said this compromise bill represents a preferred alternative to a ban of their operations.

“Ending our industry will only kill our jobs and impact our families, all while creating no net gain of wild salmon,” said Andrew Sloaf, biologist at Cooke Aquaculture Pacific.

“Working in aquaculture over the past twelve years has allowed me to become an American citizen, which I did last year on July 4<sup>th</sup>,” Dan Charron, a diver for Cooke Aquaculture Pacific, told the committee. “We are an American company producing an American product, doing its best to provide a good product

with good and responsible methods. I urge you to consider an atmosphere of cooperation and working together rather than adversity and working in conflict.”

“Since I was four years old, I’ve done nothing but enjoy fishing,” said Brett Raemer, assistant manager at Port Angeles, who has worked at the farm for 29 years. “Last thing I would want to do is harm the natural resources we have. I believe I’ve contributed to the amount of fish that can be had in Washington state and have eased the pressure on wild stocks.”

“We provide a great source of protein at a reasonable price,” said Randy Hodgkin, a Cooke Aquaculture Pacific employee and salmon farmer for 32 years, who noted that the U.S. consumed 352,000 metric tons of farmed salmon in 2016, most of it imported from overseas. “Pacific salmon are declining up and down the West Coast, and farmed salmon aren’t to blame.”

“Under this bill, it becomes not just improbable but impossible for farmed salmon to interbreed with native stocks and compete with native fish runs – which we hope will provide the necessary confidence in our operations that our tribal neighbors seek and deserve,” Bright said.

Cooke Aquaculture Pacific acquired American Gold Seafoods in June of 2016, an acquisition valued at \$70 million. Cooke Aquaculture Pacific employs 80 people in Washington, supports another 100 indirect jobs, and maintains an annual payroll of approximately \$8.5 million. It also contributes lease revenue and taxes to the state and has made and is committed to continue making significant investment in the facilities it has acquired.

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