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**Cooke Aquaculture Pacific applauds demise of SB 6086 in House**  
*Seeks to amend HB 2957 in Senate to protect salmon farming's rural workforce*

**(OLYMPIA, Washington)** Cooke Aquaculture Pacific is commending members of the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee for preventing Senate Bill 6086, which would ban Atlantic salmon sea farming in Washington state, from clearing a key legislative deadline, effectively dooming the bill for the legislative session.

"We thank the members of the committee for their wisdom in not advancing this job-killing measure, and we want to thank the committee chair, Rep. Brian Blake, in particular," said Joel Richardson, vice president of public relations for Cooke Aquaculture Pacific. The Canadian-based family owned company is the sole operator of Atlantic salmon farms in Washington and preserved the industry's workforce after purchasing the state's 30-year farming facilities in 2016 from a domestic company going bankrupt.

"Banning the state's 30-year salmon farming industry because of the regrettable accident at Cypress Island last summer would eliminate the hundreds of rural jobs directly and indirectly supported by these sea farms and would do so without scientific justification. As the Department of Fish & Wildlife has concluded, the escaped fish pose no threat to wild salmon and banning farmed salmon would not add a single wild salmon back in Puget Sound – but it would needlessly terminate the livelihood of hundreds of Washington rural families."

In testimony before the committee yesterday, Richardson explained that the fish escape at Cypress Island was not larger than several other previous escapes that occurred when Washington's salmon farms were held under domestic ownership – none of which resulted in attempts to ban the industry or cancel the farms' leases. Similarly, previous pipeline explosions, refinery accidents, oil spills or floods of raw sewage that occurred in state also did not prompt efforts to ban the domestic companies responsible, even though those incidents resulted in demonstrable harm to fish and/or humans. Richardson also explained that Cooke did apply to state and federal regulatory agencies for a net pen replacement permit seven months before the collapse to make needed improvements at Cypress Island but did not have the opportunity to do so before the facility failed in August.

"For these reasons, Cooke, as a Canadian foreign investor, has a credible claim for mandatory arbitration under NAFTA, which would compensate Cooke for our \$70-plus million investment in Washington state, plus damages," said Richardson.

But, Richardson said, this is not the company's preferred remedy.

“We are a global seafood leader, and we’ve worked extremely hard to get here,” said Richardson. “We have much to offer to make Washington an aquaculture industry leader. Allow us to bring our experience in other markets to help strengthen the regulatory framework here in Washington. Allow us to make the significant capital investments we came to Washington in 2016 prepared to make but have not had the opportunity yet to make as we face a potential eviction from the state. Allow us to invest in salmon recovery programs here in Puget Sound as we have elsewhere and partner with the Northwest Treaty Tribes to ensure that there will be wild fish to harvest in their usual and accustomed waterways for future generations. In short – instead of pushing us out, allow us to prove ourselves, be accountable and demonstrate our value and commitment as a company to Washington’s community, economy and marine ecology.”

After successfully halting the progress of SB 6086, Richardson said Cooke will now take this message to the Senate as it considers House Bill 2957, which is substantially similar to SB 6086. Richardson said the company will seek to address concerns about the potential for farmed salmon to interbreed with native salmon by offering an amendment that restricts salmon farms to raising single-sex female fish.

“Our amendment would completely mitigate the already low risk of interbreeding and colonization between farmed and wild salmon, while preserving our industry and the 600 direct and indirect jobs our industry supports,” Richardson said. “We believe this is a win-win solution, and we are hopeful that a majority of the Senate will find this solution to be a sensible one, not just for Cooke but for all agriculture and marine-based industries in Washington.”

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