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Cooke Aquaculture Pacific: Washington legislators should stand up for the sea farming families who make their livelihoods in Puget Sound

OLYMPIA, Washington – Cooke Aquaculture Pacific’s Vice President of Public Relations, Joel Richardson, had the following response to Wednesday’s vote on House Bill 2957 by the state House of Representatives:

“Many people in Washington are very disappointed that the Senate, and now the House, have approved an effective ban on the operations of a proud sector of the state’s fishing industry, operating for nearly 40 years in the Puget Sound. Washington legislators should stand up for the hundreds of rural sea farming families who depend on this industry for their livelihoods.

“Cooke started in 1985 as a family-owned company with a single net-pen and a deep commitment to sustainability and marine environmental conservation. We’ve grown into a global, respected industry leader with multiple product lines across multiple countries; and Cooke remains a family-owned company. We have held the same values of sustainability and commitment to conservation since our humble beginnings.

“We bring best-in-class practices to all of our operations throughout the world, including the latest in technology, infrastructure, research and development. When we acquired the four 30-year farms in Puget Sound in the summer of 2016, we were excited at the opportunity to bring our high standards to Washington and show the community the great promise and value of salmon farming, which produces a healthy, affordable, sustainable protein source available year-round.

“We were surprised by the very regrettable accident that occurred at Cypress Island slightly over a year after we purchased this farm. Since that incident, the company sought to work with all stakeholders, including state and tribal officials, to address their concerns and demonstrate that Cooke is a good corporate citizen interested in correcting all issues that resulted in the August incident. We recognize that some people have concerns about and oppose the farming of Atlantic salmon in Puget Sound. We also understand the value this community places on wild salmon and, as a family committed to fishing and fisheries, we share that value. Cooke’s operations do no damage to wild salmon; Atlantic salmon farming does not suppress or otherwise undermine the region’s important wild fishery. And the simple fact is that banning Atlantic salmon farming will not bring a single wild salmon back into Puget Sound and will not enhance the fishery.

“A ban on Atlantic salmon farming will, however, negatively impact on the region’s economic activity in general, with a very specific negative impact on those sea farming families who support themselves as a result of Cooke’s operations in Puget Sound. We are at a loss to understand the wisdom of the legislature’s action when we consider the non-impact that Atlantic salmon farming has on wild salmon versus the real and significant negative impact that a ban on such farming will have on area families who rely upon Cooke, directly or indirectly, for employment.

“We will continue working collaboratively with tribal governments, lawmakers, the Commissioner of Public lands, and the Governor to protect rural sea farming jobs, protect natural waters, and take meaningful steps to ensure that there are salmon in Washington’s waters to harvest now and in the future. And given the declining native salmon populations in Puget Sound waterways, we are prepared to invest in wild Pacific salmon recovery by sharing the expertise we have developed in partnership with many stakeholders in other locations.”

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