

[The following testimony is a transcription of oral testimony recorded on November 13, 2017, at the webinar hearing for proposed Chapter 173-228 WAC – Vessel Sewage No Discharge Zone. The testimony was transcribed by Dept. of Ecology staff. The original audio file of this testimony is part of the rule file (Administrative Order #17-02)]

“Hi. Thank you, and thanks to Amy, Stacey, Heather for all your work over the last five years plus in moving forward with the No Discharge Zone. We will, Puget Soundkeeper Alliance will be submitting written comments, and I think we do have another staff person testifying today at a later hearing.

I’m Chris Wilke. I’m the executive Director of Puget Soundkeeper, but I really wanted to weigh in as a private citizen today.

As a lifelong Puget Sound resident, as a boater, fisherman, kayaker, wildlife enthusiast, scuba diver, saltwater swimmer, this is really an important issue. Puget Sound is suffering from many pollution sources. We have solids, bacteria, toxins, nutrients, all entering the Puget Sound at unsustainable levels, and all of those sources of pollution can be, at least partially, addressed through a No Discharge Zone.

The obvious connection here is swimming and recreational contact, as well as shellfishing, and those risks are well established. But let’s not forget about the other contributions of nutrients and solids. It’s been shown to really have a detrimental effect on the ability of seagrass, like eelgrass, to grow – which of course, forms habitat for herring and salmon, which goes all the way up to the orca whale. And, as we’ve seen in the last few weeks, we are in danger of losing our southern resident killer whales forever.

I use the waters of Puget Sound dozens of times a year for the above activities that I’ve mentioned. As a boater, I use hook-ups, and this is something that is – they are readily available.

Through my work here at Puget Soundkeeper, we’ve been publishing a guide to, and maps to, where those pump-outs are for the last 20 years or so. I’m alarmed when I visit the Lake Island State Park and I see a sign put up by the Department of Health that says ‘no shellfishing May through September.’ I initially thought it potentially was because of algal blooms, or something like that, and then I found out, no, it’s too close to a marina and a popular boating anchorage so we just close that area for shellfishing as a precaution because of the risk of boat discharges. That’s unacceptable. As a boater that pumps out, I know it’s an easy thing to do. There’s a pump-out right there on Blake Island. There’s no reason why anyone should be pumping overboard in that location. In fact, 97% of recreational boats already have this pump-out capability, and retrofits are not very expensive to accomplish. It could be as simple as adding a Port-A-Potty to a small boat.

So, there’s quite a few pump-outs available. As I mentioned, there’s over a hundred locations, and over twenty mobile pump-outs that come around in a boat. The costs to comply are minimal. I do think that some of the figures that have been tossed around by the maritime industry regarding retrofits of tug boats – I think those can be grossly inflated, and are sort of a worst case scenario. I can also point out that many of those visits for retrofitting can be scheduled with regular maintenance or dry docking, so as to not incur those costs.

I think it’s time the Puget Sound join the other 90 No Discharge Zones around the country. These are very positive things. It’s time that Washington State have its first No Discharge Zone. It’s time that EPA Region 10 had its first No Discharge Zone.

The marine sanitation devices that are allowing compliance with rudimentary treatment are not monitored and we don’t know what the discharge is from those, or if those devices are even maintained.

So, in short, there’s plenty of pump-out available already been determined. There’s a generous compliance schedule - which I do believe is the right thing to do - that will help the industries adapt. They do know that this is coming. They shared that with us. They shared that they expect a No Discharge Zone coming in the future, and the fact that some of them are fighting it so aggressively is unconscionable. This is the right thing to do for Puget Sound and we urge you to move forward with the No Discharge Zone.