

Kevin Bright

Please accept the following comments on the Draft Guidance for Marine Net Pen Aquaculture in Washington State. As an aquatic farmer that produces aquatic foods, I am supportive of any comprehensive review of the current regulatory structures and the science that involves our industry. This industry has been science based from its very beginning, relying heavily on the many past decades of research and improved technologies that were achieved by state, federal and tribal salmon enhancement hatcheries. The culturing techniques, nutritional requirements, bio-security practices, veterinary services, vaccines, captive brood-stock programs, and a whole host of other applied fisheries research all led up to the point where someone asked the question, "why don't we just keep growing the fish we are raising in our hatchery a few months more until their ready to harvest?" That was a different way of thinking at the time and well before anybody ever coined the phrase "disruptive technology." Since then, the marine sea cage farming and global aquaculture production has taken off. The industry evolved, improved upon itself, and increased its knowledge base with even more focused government, academic and private research and development around the world. The past two decades have seen technological improvements that have made salmon and trout aquaculture into an extremely efficient form of protein production that has been found to have a smaller ecological footprint than either beef, hog or chicken production. Turns out fish have the capacity to grow more efficiently than a lot of the terrestrial agricultural animals we rely on as a food source.

Commercial marine aquaculture and especially marine fish farming are very unique food production systems that a lot of people are either completely or are very unfamiliar with. People generally do not like unfamiliarity and tend to gravitate toward the accustomed, and groups of like-minded individuals. It's in our nature and stems from our fear of the unknown. We desire simple binary answers, yes or no, good or bad, us versus them. That may have been a good survival tactic a long time ago, but today it leads to assumptions, illogical conclusions, biased information, prejudice, and probably the worst of all, an avoidance of reality. Unfortunately, examples of this primitive instinct were in full display January 6th at our nation's capital. Hopefully the positive that will come out of it is that we need to put our thinking caps on and fight primitive urges to deal with complex issues in emotional or in the "us vs them" manner. Let's hope.

There are some folks with bigger brains than mine that are looking at these things very closely, and at the same time looking at the big picture long-term trends that lay ahead us. A recent Op Ed in the Los Angeles Times written by Dr. Rosamond Naylor- Making blue foods central to the global food systems, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-07-18/fish-aquatics-blue-foods-aquaculture-global-production>), points out why we will need to reset our food production systems if we are going to keep up with both a warming planet, and an extra 2 billion people living on it within the next 30 years. If you are open to learning something new about why we need aquatic farming, I recommend reading it. Some of the reset she explains will require much more focus toward increasing aquatic farming or as she calls it the "blue food" production systems. Dr. Naylor, the founding director of the Center on Food Security and the Environment at Stanford University, points out increasing all types of aquatic farming will be necessary to equalize the protein availability around the world. She also points out that increasing blue foods will have less negative impacts than if we just increase our existing terrestrial food production systems. Are blue foods the perfect solution? No, but it is a step in the right direction to more sustainable and equitable food production systems. It will also potentially help to relieve the inevitable increasing pressure of an increasing human population to over-harvest their capture fisheries in some parts of the world. That may or may not be a problem here in the U.S. where we have the economic ability to import the majority of the seafood we eat from other parts of the world. The problem is, richer countries will be able to do that, and poorer countries won't be able to afford their own fish. They'll only be able to watch as their resource gets exported away. That is why we need to increase American grown blue foods.

The draft Guidance document clearly spells out the responsibilities of each agency. This is helpful

information for the public, the aquatic farm producers and the numerous agencies involved in protecting natural resources and preventing pollution. As regulators, you are keenly aware of the numerous rules, regulations, certifications, environmental monitoring and necessary reporting required of the aquatic farmers. State, federal and local regulations have evolved and at the same time, the marine aquatic farm industry has made many technological and operational changes to improve their performance. Both the regulations and the advancements in aquatic farming have been aimed at protecting the natural environment by preventing pollution, increasing production efficiencies, producing less material waste, minimizing discharges and working toward balancing the farms with the environment they operate in. Aquatic farmers understand the need to operate in a sustainable and responsible manner to gain both public confidence and the social license to have a business that relies on natural resources and public land. Aquaculture is a unique industry, but in essence is no different than any other private party, business or public entity that uses public lands. Those lands are owned by all the residents of Washington and the people that use those lands need to carry out those uses in a manner that does not cause long term harm to the environment. Timber sales on public lands, geoduck harvesting on state owned land, private and public marinas, shellfish farming, trail hiking, camping, motorbiking and private buoys are more commonly known uses of our public natural resources. These uses all have rules and regulations which are designed to protect the resources of the state while providing benefit to the citizens of the state either through employment, recreation, food, wood products, tax revenues and local economic activity.

Marine net pen aquaculture includes both private and public enhancement net pens and both forms bring economic activity and seafood to American consumers. Going forwards, both enhancement fish pens and grow out net pens will be needed to take pressure off the wild capture fisheries and allow the time for the restoration projects to continue and fishery recoveries to occur. Marine net pens need to be carefully operated and regulated to minimize risks and potential negative impacts. They also need to be studied further, monitored carefully and developed in a manner that keeps environmental impacts to a minimum. There also needs to be a point where we look back and remember where we came from, but then look forward, find the best science-based path forward and the resolve to take it to a more sustainable future.

I would like to point out that I think Ecology should review the local jurisdiction and SMP development section written in the draft Guidance document with respect to SMP's and the SMA. A recent decision by the Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board (Case No. 18-3-0013c) against the Pierce County SMP is precedent setting for locally derived aquaculture regulations in their SMP's and clearly spells out the limitations to local control over Shorelines of Statewide Significance. The Board found with regard to the Shorelines of Statewide Significance (the subtidal zones), the statewide interests outweigh local control in developing and approving local SMP's. This makes sense, since these subtidal waters are used for navigation, recreation, marine trade routes, commercial fishing, national security, aquaculture and whole host of other water dependent uses of which local control gives way to the statewide interest. Fostering aquaculture is listed as a statewide interest and marine net pen aquaculture is a water dependent activity that occurs in the shorelines of statewide significance. A synopsis of the decision is included below. I believe Ecology should take this opportunity to clarify the point in the Guidance document which will help future local jurisdictions and SMP writers to define the scope of their authority regarding shorelines of statewide significance.

"Taylor Shellfish Company, Inc., North Bay Partners, Seattle Shellfish, LLC. (Petitioners) challenged the adoption and approval of Pierce County's (County's) comprehensive shoreline master program update of Ordinance 2013-45s4. The Board concluded that some of the aspects of the County's action failed to comply with RCW 90.58.020, RCW 90.58.100, and the applicable Guidelines because of failures to give preference to aquaculture as a preferred use and failures to base the actions on scientific and technological information and management recommendations.

The Board finds that Ecology's approval of the SMP, to the extent that it is based on an apparent determination that the County could adopt restrictions on aquaculture to "balance" the preferences of local citizens against the statewide interest in fostering aquaculture provided proof of Ecology's failure to comply with RCW 90.58.020 and the applicable Guidelines."

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely, Kevin Bright