

3 June 2020

Laurie Niewolny  
Water Quality Program, Department of Ecology  
P.O. Box 47600  
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Cooke Aquaculture NPDES permit to raise steelhead

Dear Ms. Niewolny:

It pains me that it is necessary to write this letter, given the past record of blatant disregard for the environment demonstrated by Cooke Aquaculture. We have had enough experience with this corporation and their careless ways to know that it is not in the best interest of Washington and our Salish Sea to allow their activities to continue. Several years ago the Washington legislature told this corporation and the residents that raising non-native species in marine netpens could not continue. This mandate was based on the bad behavior of this very corporation. Instead of realizing this practice is risky no matter the species, now we are faced with Ecology trying to justify raising steelhead in the same negligent and environmentally troubling manner. Clearly, this is an attempt to make an end run around the efforts of citizens of the state to get these netpens out of our marine environment.

Here are some of the reasons I think this operation cannot be allowed to continue. The density of fish raised in the netpens creates problems of disease spread among the fish and potentially to native fish passing through or near the netpens. The fish in these things create vast amounts of fish poop that settles onto the seabed adding a heavy pollution load and damaging the ecosystem in the area. There is a possibility of escape (maybe more safely called a probability of escape) and that act alone constitutes pollution of the marine waters. The food for these captive fish is sourced from fish that otherwise would provide sustenance to native fish that rely on the forage fish in the wild for their existence. This is not a good use of the fish stocks. No person who has any sense of what constitutes healthful food would knowingly eat the fish that are raised in the netpens. Unfortunately, many vendors are less than truthful about the source of the fish they sell or market.

Do not grant the permit for the change in species as requested by Cooke. And as a further note, why the rush to short circuit the normal public comment and involvement process right now? Clearly, people have their minds occupied with many other pressing matters related to surviving this pandemic, the economic and jobs collapse and now the social unrest due to systemic racism in our society. This matter should not be decided until it is possible to hold more public hearings that people can attend in person.

Thank you.

Maradel Gale