

Linda Chaves

I am in support of the Cooke Pacific Aquaculture request to change the species to be cultured in their net pens from Atlantic salmon to sterile triploid rainbow trout/steelhead.

I am a NOAA Fisheries retiree where, over the course of over thirty years, I worked closely with the scientific and business community on issues including fisheries and aquaculture development, seafood and health, and international trade, at both the regional and national level. I was responsible for developing national aquaculture policy, program plans, and draft legislation; working with foreign governments on aquaculture issues; representing the U.S. in the development of FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification; and served as the NOAA Aquaculture Program Manager.

The FAO 2020 Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture report states that "To ensure a food secure future for all, the fisheries and aquaculture sector is key." Aquaculture, whether for steelhead, Atlantic salmon, or any other fisheries product, is an important contributor to food security around the world. The United States, with the largest EEZ in the world and extensive state waters ranks only 17th in the world for aquaculture production, however, and contributes very little to global aquaculture production. Domestic seafood consumption relies on imports for over 90 percent of its seafood with over 50 percent of imports estimated to be farmed. Our seafood supply is not secure!

The Cooke Aquaculture project, should be an important element of the Washington State economy now and in the future. With increasing global population, static or decreasing wild capture fisheries, growing demand for existing wild and farmed seafood, the only option for increasing supply is aquaculture. Washington State should be an active player both within state waters and offshore to provide safe and healthy U.S.-produced product, reduce reliance on imports, and provide products for the rest of the United States and export. Cooke Aquaculture can do this in a safe and responsible manner while providing year-round employment, not only for the farm staff, but also for staffing of allied support services including seafood processing which itself employs 25 people.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I would hope that the Department of Ecology will base its decisions on peer-reviewed scientific papers addressing the issues of concern, rather than popular misconceptions and beliefs. The Cooke SEPA Checklist and Attachments document includes many peer-reviewed scientific papers that address the concerns that have been raised by the opposition.

Note: I am not now, nor have ever been, paid by any segment of the fisheries, aquaculture, or seafood industry to support or lobby for any specific position.