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In reading the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife brief on why they OK'ed the Cooke steelhead pens, I was struck by three points:

1) Presently, Washington laws only prohibit farming non-native species, and that limits the actions WDFW can take. The fact that Cooke is not (yet) petitioning to open pens in new areas, also means they are not required to do an environmental impact statement, further limiting WDFW responses.

2) WDFW studies indicate the local environmental impact of new pens won't be worse than the old ones, and MAY be somewhat better. That is not a reassuring statement, although the brief does include regulations the company must follow. However, Cooke has not maintained their pens well in the past, and at the present time the state probably can't afford to ensure that they do now. In addition, If the steelhead are fed fish meal, the fish stocks used to obtain that fish meal are also endangered in many areas, although this factor is beyond the control of WDFW.

3) Net pens are banned or restricted in other mainland states on the Pacific Ocean, and British Columbia plans to move away from them. However, for Washington to follow suit would require legislative action - WDFW can't by themselves ban net pens.

I think we need new laws , based on scientific data to tell us the most responsible ways to feed ourselves seafood while still protecting other creature who depend on the same resources.

Obviously, that isn't the point of this process. At the very least I would like to see a study of the environmental impact (including fish food, parasites, diseases and the antibiotics used to treat the diseases) associated with with past Cooke pens before this project can move forward. Fish pens are a flawed system, and we need to reconsider depending on them.