

Anonymous Anonymous

I am writing to express concerns over considerations to allow Cooke Aquaculture Pacific to continue operating in Puget Sound. Their latest request to modify their existing pollutant discharge permits in their efforts to expand and extend net pen aquaculture should be thoroughly reviewed.

Cooke Aquaculture is a garbage company peddling garbage fish. The steelhead Cooke proposes using in their net pens are highly-domesticated, biologically-altered to be partially-sterile, and genetically dissimilar to wild stocks. Similar to nonnative farmed Atlantic salmon, these fish are considered and regulated as a pollutant under the Clean Water Act if they escape into public waters. Cooke Aquaculture has an embarrassing track record of harming water quality and putting native salmon at risk. Negligence led to the collapse of its net pen in Deepwater Bay off Cyprus Island and they were fined \$2.75 million dollars last year for violations of the Clean Water Act. Cooke has demonstrated that they cannot ensure that the farmed fish do not escape in our waters. Farmed fish that escape into local waters pose a massive threat to native species as they compete for food and spawning resources. These are garbage fish that spread viruses, parasites and other toxins.

Washington passed a new law in 2018 which protects our local ecosystem from the great risk of net pens. HB 2957 banned Atlantic salmon net pens and created a new and stricter regulatory regime for marine net pen aquaculture. These new standards require re-examining past decisions in order to hold Cooke Aquaculture to that higher standard of eliminating these risks. Any and all processes that consider any permit modifications to continue net pen farming must require that Cooke show that they can achieve the state's goal to "eliminate...escapement and to eliminate negative impacts to water quality and native fish, shellfish, and wildlife." Switching species does NOT reduce the rampant daily pollution and water quality risks posed by open water net pen aquaculture. Ecology should not limit the scope of their review to risks associated with a change of species.

Cooke Aquaculture is proposing to continue operating in our waters which we the people have a right to protect. Ecology should not modify permits until Cooke has initiated and received agreement from all local, state, federal, and tribal governments. Elected officials and government bodies accountable to their constituents should decide if net pen farming is acceptable and what if any modifications should be approved.