

Linda Teresa Di Biase

As a volunteer in the Orca Network, I have learned how critical a healthy marine environment is to the very survival of iconic Northwest species such as the orca whale. The past record of Cooke Aquaculture's noncompliance with permit stipulations relative to the 2017 Cypress Pen collapse, as well as the company's inadequate emergency response to the 2019 partial sinking of the Orchard Rocks pen reveal what is at stake: the health of the Salish Sea and its inhabitants. Cooke Aquaculture's record does not inspire confidence in their ability to protect our water quality and wild fisheries. To preserve our fragile marine ecosystem the Washington State Legislature passed in 2018 HB 2957, creating a new and stricter regulatory regime for marine net pen aquaculture. In light of these new regulations, the standard of review of Cooke's submissions must take into account the state's stated goal both to eliminate escapement and also to eliminate negative impacts to water quality and native fish, shellfish, and wildlife. Can Cooke Aquaculture actually live up to these requirements? History -- and science (which provides overwhelming evidence of the inherent risks of marine aquaculture) -- say NO.