

May 4, 2020

Laura Watson
Interim Director, Department of Ecology P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504

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

Dear Ms. Watson and Ms. Niewolny,

We are asking that the Department of Ecology delay the public comment related to Cooke Aquaculture's request for permit modifications to raise Native Steelhead until restrictions are lifted under Governor Jay Inslee's Stay Home, Stay Healthy proclamation.

Locally on Bainbridge Island, the home of a majority of Cooke's net pen facilities, an April 24, 2020 edition of a local paper, "98110", put out by Sound Publishing Inc., saw fit to print an announcement "Ecology seeking public comment" related to Cooke Aquaculture's request to modify its existing water quality permits. This announcement appeared on the last page of the paper before more real estate ads. This edition also featured a special "Covid-19: A Local Survival Guide" insert.

No mention of the Department of Ecology's request for comment has appeared, to my knowledge, in the Bainbridge Islander, Kitsap Sun or Seattle Times.

The Bainbridge Public library, which has hosted public meetings related to the net pen industry, remains shuttered through mid-June ("at least" according to their website) with public meeting rooms closed until August.

You will not get the kind of public engagement that is required during a once in one hundred year pandemic. It is my understanding that over 3,500 people submitted comments when WDFW sought public comment on Cooke Aquaculture farming of rainbow trout/steelhead. This demonstrates the public's interest in this issue under something resembling normal circumstances. Now, we live in a State where one out of five people have filed unemployment claims, where some work in essential jobs and others are balancing families and working from home, home schooling children, dealing with elderly family members, working to keep a business afloat or maybe wondering how to pay mortgages or rent.

Government works best when its citizens are engaged in the public process. With the current challenging environment, we predict that you will not get the type of public engagement that is vital to

the process. Please delay the public comment period at least sixty days beyond the Governor's proclamation restrictions and conduct a series of public meetings to further gauge the public's response to Cooke's request to modify existing permits.

Cooke Aquaculture currently has the necessary permits to raise Atlantic salmon. There is no urgency to press forward with the public comment process that has been derailed by a global pandemic.

Sincerely,

Ron & Lorraine Howlett

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