

# Dan Swecker

As a retired state Senator and former fish farmer, I fully understand the risks and impacts of a commercial net pen operation the environment and native stocks. In addition to our freshwater operation in Rochester, WA,. my company also applied and received a permit to raise fish in saltwater in Case Inlet near Hartstine Island in South Puget Sound.

During my tenure in the Senate, I also served on the Natural Resources Committee for 18 years, and am very familiar not only with the status of stocks in Puget Sound, but also the various impacts on them as well as the potential for threats that might cause a deleterious effect on them.

While it has been shown beyond a doubt that Atlantics cannot and do not breed with native Pacific salmon stocks, the decision by Cooke Aquaculture to switch to sterile, all-female, triploid, Rainbow Trout/Steelhead is the very best option for eliminating any possible impact on the environment or native stocks. Should any of these fish escape, they will not reproduce because they are sterile. In fact the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife routinely stocks these same fish in freshwater lakes throughout the state.

The preference for these fish is that they grow faster than other fish (considered an advantage by sportsmen). In addition, they will not reproduce and compete with native stocks. The state uses the same process as the private sector to create triploid fish that they routinely introduce in bodies of water though out the state. There are no chemicals used to do this. Instead, at fertilization, the eggs are subjected to high pressure for a few minutes which causes them to retain three sets of chromosomes. This results in the eggs that produce only sterile fish.

With regard to disease, these stocks are certified disease-free prior to entry in saltwater. The only possible disease- transfer that might occur would be from wild fish to the commercial stocks in the net pens. If such a transfer should occur, the problem would be detected right away and appropriate action would be taken to resolve it. This would result in no additional risk to native stocks.

In my 18-year experience as a legislator, I saw no legitimate statewide policy or priority that these fish being used for commercial aquaculture would impact. Some public policies would be greatly enhanced. One of those is the need for jobs in our rural communities. In the recent past, commercial net pen aquaculture has provided up to 400 jobs at any one time. The economic viability of some of these communities is heavily dependent on commercial aquaculture.

It has been suggested that the areas occupied by the net pens would be better utilized for recreational access. It is important to remember that most of rural Puget Sound is available for this purpose. Very little of the land is set aside to use for aquaculture. Around the world other countries and making huge efforts to expand aquaculture. It is now producing most of the seafood that we consume. It is critical that our country participate and remain competitive in the international marketplace.

I would like to make a strong recommendation that this application be approved for the good of rural communities, our natural resources and the state as a whole. Let's stop importing these products from other countries and produce them ourselves.

Sincerely,  
Dan Swecker  
Senator, retired