PORT GAMBLE S'KLALLAM TRIBE
NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
31912 Little Boston Rd. NE – Kingston, WA 98346

August 27, 2025

Jeremy Reiman
Department of Ecology, Water Quality Program
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

RE: Nutrient Puget Sound Reduction Plan Comments

Dear Mr. Reiman,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Department of Ecology's Draft Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Plan. It is encouraging to see the state take seriously the degraded dissolved oxygen conditions of Puget Sound, but we feel there is more that should be done. The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe relies on fishing for its economic and cultural wellbeing and thus has a large stake in the health of Port Gamble Bay and Hood Canal especially, but also its entire Usual & Accustomed Area, which includes much of Puget Sound. Low dissolved oxygen levels sufficient to cause fishkills, or prevent shellfish from reproducing, threatens the Tribe's Treaty Rights and way of life, and we are firmly opposed to any action or inaction that threatens to exacerbate this problem.

The main problem with the Plan lies with its long timeframes. The Plan's goal is to achieve State Water Quality Standards by 2050, meaning a quarter century of noncompliance is tacitly approved by Ecology. The State's Water Quality Standards are currently in effect and as such should be enforced *now,* not in 25 years when Puget Sound will be even more degraded than it currently is. It also gives polluters a longer time frame to continue using outdated waste treatment technologies and methods. A 2030 or 2035 goal would be much more reasonable as it would still provide polluters ample time to update their facilities without giving them license to pollute for decades.

In regard to the milestones listed in tables 9 and 10, we again take issue with the long timeframes. Why are Water Quality Based Effluent Limits (WQBELs) not set to take effect for six more years? WQBELs need to be established immediately and then compliance timelines can be developed *within* permits that are issued to polluters.

We are also concerned that the Plan makes no mention of important factors like the growing population within the Puget Sound region, climate change, and downstream effects of low dissolved oxygen concentrations. As more people move to this area, waste treatment plants must process and discharge ever more effluent, exacerbating existing conditions. That this gets no mention within the Plan is troubling. It is also troubling that climate change gets very little mention. Warming waters contribute to low dissolved oxygen levels by increasing marine respiration and by reducing the amount of oxygen the water can absorb. Combined with increased nutrient inputs from a growing population and the effects of ocean acidification[1] it is likely that dissolved oxygen concentrations will become even worse than they are today, which will further degrade the Puget Sound ecosystem by impacting forage fish[2], salmonids, and all the species that rely on them for food. Shellfish are especially impacted by low dissolved oxygen as they cannot move throughout the water column to more habitable conditions.

The Tribe is also opposed to the practice of "nutrient credits." The Nutrient Credit system is based off the Carbon Credit system where polluters can "buy" credits from other polluters who don't use them all. This ensures that polluters can discharge all their pollutants rather than find ways to reduce them. It doesn't

[1] Miller S.H., Breitburg D.L., Burrell R.B., Keppel A.G. (2016) Acidification increases sensitivity to hypoxia in important forage fishes. Mar Ecol Prog Ser 549:1-8 https://doi.org/10.3354/meps11695
[2] DePasquale E., Baumann H., Gobler C.J. (2015) Vulnerability of early life stage Northwest Atlantic forage fish to ocean acidification and low oxygen. Mar Ecol Prog Ser 523:145-156 https://doi.org/10.3354/meps11142

work with carbon[3] and there's no reason to think it will work with nutrients, particularly when paired with the multi-decadal timeframes the Plan proposes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Puget Sound Nutrient Plan. We look forward to hearing your response to our public comment.

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Environmental Scientist
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[3] Yan, Y., Lei, Y., Tang, Y., & Zhao, X. (2022). Ineffectiveness of carbon cap-and-trade market. *Energy & Environment*, *34*(7), 2317-2342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958305X221105268