



Northwest Aquaculture Alliance

For Immediate Release

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NWAA TO PUBLIC LANDS COMMISSIONER FRANZ: YOU GOT IT WRONG!

Just four days after she announced that she would not renew Cooke Aquaculture's fish farming leases, Washington state Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz held a press conference where, flanked by her anti-aquaculture supporters from the Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC), she declared an end to the proud 40-year tradition of fish farming in Puget Sound.

In response, the [Northwest Aquaculture Alliance](#), joined by six other leading seafood trade associations—the National Fisheries Institute, National Aquaculture Association, Global Seafood Alliance, Best Aquaculture Practices, California Aquaculture Association, and the US Trout Farmers Association, as well as respected fisheries scientists, veterinarians, and fish health professionals—has called for a third-party review of the science upon which Commissioner Franz made her decision.

NWAA, whose member companies include the leading seafood producers and support businesses from Hawaii to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska, has issued the following statement:

Our hearts go out to the 34 employees of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific, many who are second-generation fish farmers, and many who have worked as fish farmers in this state for well over three—and as many as five—decades. We are heartbroken for their families and their communities as well. This devastating decision will have a ripple effect that will extend far beyond the company.

The unfortunate timing of this announcement, at the beginning of the holiday season—with an impossible December 14 deadline to remove equipment and slaughter 332,000 juvenile fish, representing 2,656,000 meals—shows both a lack of humanity and an alarming lapse of leadership.

This is no way to run a public agency, and our coalition has four words for Commissioner Franz:

You got it wrong.

This sudden decision to terminate leases without any scientific or legal basis, of a company that spent five years working with the State of Washington to meet its rigorous new net pen guidelines, should concern every business that leases public lands here in Washington.

We challenge the public to look past the “piling on” of negative stories that the Commissioner's actions have spawned and instead look at the inconvenient truth that the head of DNR has ignored: There exists a vast body of scientific studies that show minimal impact of today's aquaculture practices on other species and the environment.

The reality is this: **Of the 2.6 million acres of public aquatic lands in Washington, the four available leases total 112 acres, with just 11 acres used for net pens. That's 0.0004% of all public lands available for lease.**

In NFL football today, there is a rule against taunting players. Yet that is precisely what Franz and the WFC have done in a full-page ad in the *Seattle Times* Sunday edition that declares, “WE WON!”

We ask this:

- How is it a WIN when you ignore your sister agencies, such as the Department of Ecology and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, who worked closely with Cooke as the company sought to comply with the state’s new rigorous net pen guidance?
- How is it a WIN when you look the other way at a serious biological opinion filed by the nation’s leading science agency, NOAA, whose multi-year peer reviewed biological opinion found no harm from net pens to the environment OR endangered species?
- How is it a WIN when you ignore the State Supreme Court’s unanimous approval to allow Cooke to farm steelhead in Washington waters?
- And how, indeed, is it a WIN to celebrate at the expense of hard-working people who now face losing their jobs farming a seafood product that the market wants and now must source from other countries? How indeed?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fundraising appeal that the Franz camp issued immediately after the press conference concluded, titled “Protect Puget Sound.” A closer read, however, makes it clear the funds will be used solely by Hilary Franz to line her coffers for future political activities—and do so on the backs of hard-working people.

Here’s the reality: The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued guidelines for healthy eating for Americans, and those guidelines call for eating at least two seafood meals per week. Where will that fish come from? We have an opportunity here to produce a high-quality seafood product that the market wants and needs.

Today, the United States imports 6 billion pounds of seafood annually, at a trade deficit of \$17 billion. Essentially, what the Franz decision does may seem like a “win” for the environment, but it does just the opposite. By shutting down production here, we are ignoring the environmental impacts of transporting goods produced elsewhere, creating, in essence, “the illusion of natural resource preservation.”

In the next several days, we will deliver a letter to Commissioner Franz, asking some tough questions about the science that DNR used to make its decision. Was this science from the nation’s leading science agency, NOAA, or did it come from groups such as the WFC, an ENGO with a track record of suing state agencies, the federal government, hatcheries, and private enterprise to line its coffers?

It is our hope that the seafood-consuming public will take the time to learn more about responsible, sustainable aquaculture as it is practiced today by companies such as our valued member, Cooke Aquaculture Pacific, and join us in seeking answers to how this unfortunate decision was made.

For more information on aquaculture, visit [Marine Aquaculture | NOAA Fisheries](#).

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