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Intelligence

U.S. seafood groups want independent review of Washington's ban on steelhead farms

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

State ruled against Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's steelhead farm leases this week

In response to this Monday's announcement that Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will not renew the leases for Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's steelhead farms in state waters, three leading U.S. trade groups called for an independent review of the decision.

The [Northwest Aquaculture Alliance](https://www.nwaquaculturealliance.org/) (NWAA), [National Fisheries Institute](http://www.nfi.org/) (NFI), and the [National Aquaculture Association](https://thenaa.net/) (NAA) issued a joint statement on Wednesday, saying an independent third party, such as the University of Washington School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, should be allowed to weigh in on the decision, which demanded Cooke begin dismantling their farms in two weeks.

"This was not a decision based on science," said NWAA President and CEO of tribally owned [Jamestown Seafood](https://jamestownseafood.com/our-seafoods/), Jim Parsons. "If that were the case, we would be seeing a very different decision. In terminating Cooke's marine net pen leases, the DNR has ignored the best available science from NOAA, a state Supreme Court ruling, the Washington



Three U.S. trade groups want an independent review of Washington's decision to not renew leases for Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's steelhead farms. Shutterstock image.

Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Washington Department of Ecology, to name just a few of the countless scientific studies from other regions demonstrating that marine aquaculture does not harm endangered species or wild fish stocks. The DNR decision will have devastating consequences for our rural communities where living-wage jobs are scarce, while at the same time taking healthy protein off American plates. This will result in a great loss to local economies and public health."

NOAA recently issued a **five-year strategic plan** (<https://www.globalseafood.org/advocate/u-s-agency-announces-5-year-strategy-for-aquaculture/>), to develop a national aquaculture sector, which ranks 18th in the world in aquaculture production, according to NOAA.

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“Washington state has apparently decided to ignore the enormous body of science that shows marine aquaculture, as it is practiced today, has a negligible impact on other fish species or on the environment,” Parsons said. “We fail to understand why, at a time when we are beginning to see massive layoffs in the tech sector, a government agency would willingly and knowingly destroy a job-creating industry, one that in other regions has brought living-wage employment and economic development to hard-hit rural areas. Additionally, we find it puzzling that an agency whose mission is to protect our natural resources would target one of the most climate-friendly and environmentally beneficial food sectors. We are also at a loss to understand why DNR would choose to ignore the science that shows marine aquaculture to have a negligible impact on the water – particularly compared with other marine water users.”

“Aquaculture has the ability to sustainably and affordably increase the availability of the healthiest animal protein on the planet, while also producing jobs – an impressive combination,” said Gavin Gibbons, Vice President for Communications at the National Fisheries Institute. “At a time when important efforts to grow the U.S. aquaculture sector are underway, this decision is disappointing,” he said.

“The U.S. aquaculture farming community recognizes the value and benefits of regulations to protect the public, environment and farming operations,” added Sebastian Belle, president of the National Aquaculture Association. “In this instance where science is ignored, which is so very critical to achieving excellence in governance and finding a balance between man and nature, no one benefits. We strongly support an independent review by objective scientists and hope the citizens of Puget Sound will agree.”

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