

Focus on: Marine Finfish Aquaculture



WHY IT MATTERS

The state has adopted regulations and policies to address the environmental risks finfish net pens pose to state waters, but Washington's current net pen guidance document is more than 30 years old. State agencies, local governments, and industry need new planning tools and guidance that incorporate today's science and modern practices.

Now, the state departments of Agriculture, Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources are working together to update the state's commercial marine finfish net pen guidance.

This guidance will create a decision framework for local governments regarding how, where, and whether to site commercial marine finfish net pens in their jurisdictions.

Legislation

In 2018, Gov. Jay Inslee signed Engrossed House Bill 2957, which prohibits the Washington Department of Natural Resources from renewing or issuing new leases of state-owned aquatic lands for the purpose of non-native marine finfish aquaculture.

The bill also prohibits the state departments of Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife from authorizing or permitting raising non-native finfish in marine net pens after the expiration date of the current leases of state-owned aquatic lands, in 2022.

The bill directs the departments of Agriculture, Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources to continue an existing effort to update guidance and informational resources to industry and governments for planning and permitting commercial net pen aquaculture of marine finfish species.

Bill directives

EHB 2957 instructs the four state agencies to develop guidance on:

- Local shoreline permitting and water quality.
- Current science concerning impacts from marine finfish aquaculture operations on native fish, shellfish, and wildlife.
- Best management practices to operate finfish aquaculture safely in the marine environment.
- Interagency coordination in permitting, inspections, and enforcement.
- Recommendations for future legislative oversight of marine finfish net pen aquaculture.

The bill requires state agencies report to the Legislature by November 1, 2019.

Contact information

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Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation, including materials in a format for the visually impaired, please call Ecology at 360-407-7285 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>.

People with impaired hearing may call Washington's Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

Progress report

Prior to the August 2017 Atlantic salmon net pen collapse, an interagency working group made up of representatives from the state departments of Agriculture, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife requested the federal National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) to produce a report assessing the state of the science on risks associated with marine net pen aquaculture. Following EHB 2957, the work group now includes the state Department of Natural Resources and anticipated the NCCOS report would be the state guidance document.

From December 2018 through April 2019, the work group reviewed the first NCCOS report draft. Since NCCOS' effort predated EHB 2957 and provided a worldwide perspective, the group decided more state-specific guidance was needed. Finalized in June 2019, the NCCOS report is being used as one of several resources to develop a new state-focused guidance document, slated for spring 2020.

Agency policy updates

Since EHB 2957 was signed, state agencies have been reviewing the latest science while also improving policy. These important actions also have occurred:

- The Department of Natural Resources improved its net hygiene monitoring based on the findings of *2017 Cypress Island Atlantic Salmon Net Pen Failure: An Investigation and Review* released in January 2018.
- The Department of Ecology issued updated National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, in accordance with EHB 2957, for existing marine finfish net pen operations. They include improved protections and requirements to reduce environmental impacts.
- In March 2019, the Department of Fish and Wildlife renewed Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's existing permit for its finfish net pen operations raising Atlantic salmon. Cooke Aquaculture also submitted an application and associated State Environmental Policy Act documentation to Fish and Wildlife seeking permission to raise native, sterile female steelhead trout in net pens in Puget Sound. The department prepared a mitigated determination of non-significance that included 22 measures to offset environmental impacts and is currently accepting written public comment through November 22, 2019.

Guidance timeline

- **Ongoing:** Consultation with tribal governments.
- **April 2020:** Share draft guidance document with government partners and other authorities.
- **May 2020:** Finalize guidance document.