

Realised Expectations

Applied Family Farm Investment & Resource (AFFIRM)

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House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah McDonald, Vice Chair
Representative Court Boice, Member
Representative Annessa Hartman, Member
Representative Bobby Levy, Member
Representative Pam Marsh, Member
Representative Susan McLain
Representative Anna Scharf, Member

900 Court Street NE, Salem OR 97301

Subject: HB 2965: follow-up to public hearing

Dear Representatives,

My opposition to the above-reference bill has only heightened today after giving testimony during the public hearing.

The proposed legislation was introduced as being necessary to prevent pending catastrophe. Apparently, water-based aqua farming, specifically cages or pens for finfish (not any other aquatic organisms), poses such an eminent threat to our coastal ecosystems as well as even public health that the only salvation can be in totally **banning all finfish farming in Oregon's coastal waters**.

Although the state has, so far, no direct experience with these perceived-as highly disastrous aquatic agricultural practices, the bill's supporters feel there is an incontrovertible body of "knowledge" that attests to the dire risks of *in situ* finfish aquaculture. This massive risk notwithstanding, the bill's authors do not share with us any specifics as to the exact nature of these dangers.

Cameral mention was made, among others, of issues relating to invasive species, toxic chemicals, fecal build-up, diseases, and even the targeting of carnivorous fish that eat fish (rather, that eat fish meal in their feed). It was also stated that farmed-fish undercut the markets for wild-caught products. In short, cages and pens were "magnets" that attracted terrible problems. Escapements were inevitable. Farmed fish ate other fish. Pesticides and pharmaceuticals were doused into the waters. And all this was scientifically established.

This is an amazing assessment of cage or pen culture when the United Nations reports that the global harvest from these water-based systems is in excess fifty-million-tons. There would seem to be no way that such cataclysmic farming methods could yield such positive outputs.

The truth is that cage and pen culture are **tested and true components** of many legitimate and environmentally friendly aquacultural programs and businesses around the world.

Any human endeavor can suffer from errors and even bad judgement. Certainly, broadly speaking, aquaculture as one of the newest forms of agriculture, has had growing pains and its fair share of challenges. However, the technology (both biological and social) has grown as quickly as the aquaculture sector itself.

To name just a few of the issues where the facts run contrary to the perceptions of some, global trends are for producing aqua feeds free of fish meal and some Northwest producers are already having excellent results using these innovative diets. These same trends are targeting herbivorous as opposed to carnivorous fishes as new crops sitting lower on the food chain. Increasing improvements in fish feeds lead to conversion ratios of close to 1:1 (i.e., one pound of feed giving one pound of weight gain)—feeds that have high digestibility and produce relatively small amounts of fecal material. Aquaculture is also high-tech with sensors monitoring any particles falling from enclosures as well as cameras monitoring fish behavior and health (not to mention samples of the benthos taken at very frequent intervals).

And more to the point than these technological advances, farmers are not in the business to lose their crops. All farmers do all they can to minimize disease and mortality; loss of their crops and degradation of their farms.

A final note on markets. Recent indications are that, given the persistent inability for seafood supply to keep up with growing demand, capture and culture items are settling as complementary products in many markets—numerous European fishing companies now investing in farming to ensure a higher volume of food to market.

In light of all of the above, **it makes absolutely no sense to completely ban marine finfish farming in Oregon!**

Control measures and standards exist. Efforts should be channeled to optimize the efficacy of these instruments while also optimizing the productivity of our resources to generate food and jobs for Oregonians while demonstrating that the Oregon Way can lead to modern, sustainable aquatic agriculture that is the envy of the country.

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to use my decades of aquacultural experience hopefully for the betterment of the state's seafood industry.

Sincerely,

John Moehl, PhD
Aquaculture Specialist