

Bill: HB 2965

Committee: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Position: Support

Date: February 27, 2025

Dear Chair Clem, Vice-Chair McLain, Vice-Chair Sprenger, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

I write today on behalf of The Humane League and our supporters across Oregon to request your support of HB 2965, which would prohibit the use of commercial net-pen aquaculture in Oregon's marine and estuarine waters. This bill aligns with growing scientific consensus and national trends, ensuring that Oregon's marine ecosystems remain healthy and its wild fish populations protected. By implementing this common-sense measure, Oregon can prevent the well-documented environmental and economic harms associated with open-water fish farming.

Protecting Oregon's Marine Ecosystems and Wild Fisheries

Oregon has a duty to safeguard its coastal waters and native fish populations. The scientific and regulatory experience from other states reaffirms that commercial net-pen aquaculture poses significant risks to marine environments. These risks include:

- **Water Pollution:** Net pens release uneaten feed, fish waste, antibiotics, and chemicals directly into public waters, leading to water quality degradation and harmful algal blooms.
- **Disease and Parasite Transmission:** High-density fish farms create breeding grounds for pathogens and parasites like sea lice, which can spread to wild fish populations, including Oregon's struggling salmon and steelhead.
- **Escaped Farmed Fish:** Accidental releases of farmed fish threaten native species through competition, hybridization, and disruption of local ecosystems. Washington state saw firsthand the consequences of a major Atlantic salmon escape in 2017, prompting a statewide ban on commercial net-pen aquaculture.

A National Trend Toward Banning Net-Pen Aquaculture

Oregon's HB 2965 follows the lead of other states that have already recognized the dangers of commercial net-pen operations and taken action to prohibit them:

- **Washington (2022, 2024):** After years of environmental concerns and the catastrophic collapse of a Cooke Aquaculture facility in Puget Sound, Washington permanently ended all commercial net-pen leases in state waters. The decision was supported by tribal nations, conservation groups, and fishery stakeholders.
- **Alaska (1990):** To protect its thriving wild salmon industry, Alaska enacted a full ban on commercial finfish farming, ensuring that aquaculture would not jeopardize its globally renowned wild fisheries.

- **California (De Facto Ban):** Stringent environmental regulations in California have effectively prohibited commercial net-pen aquaculture, requiring all aquaculture operations to be fully contained and land-based to prevent ecological harm.
- **Michigan (Great Lakes):** By refusing to grant any permits, Michigan has effectively banned net-pen aquaculture in its portion of the Great Lakes, citing potential risks to water quality and the local economy.

Economic and Environmental Benefits of HB 2965

Banning commercial net-pen aquaculture is not only an environmental imperative but also an economically sound decision. Oregon's tourism industry relies on clean water and healthy marine ecosystems. By preventing pollution and disease transmission from fish farms, HB 2965 will help:

- **Safeguard Wild Fisheries:** Oregon's commercial and recreational fishing industries depend on the health of wild salmon and other marine species. Preventing net-pen aquaculture reduces the risk of disease outbreaks and invasive species harming these vital resources.
- **Protect Coastal Jobs and Businesses:** Coastal economies thrive on sustainable fisheries, ecotourism, and recreational fishing. The collapse of net-pen facilities in Washington led to costly cleanups and legal battles; Oregon can avoid similar liabilities by proactively prohibiting this harmful practice.

Conclusion

Oregon has an opportunity to protect its coastal waters, and HB 2965 represents a proactive, science-based approach to safeguarding Oregon's marine environment for future generations. I urge the committee to pass this critical legislation and uphold Oregon's commitment to environmental stewardship and economic sustainability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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