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## Atlantic Salmon Farms Banned in Washington State

By Michael Hamilton

**A**tlantic salmon farming in Washington state waters has been permanently banned. In March, Governor Jay Inslee signed new regulations that will phase out fish farming of nonnative species by 2025. Last-minute maneuvering—to include a provision stating that the legislature would research and revisit the issue as new science becomes available—was vetoed by the governor, bringing a decisive end to at least three decades of Atlantic salmon farming in Puget Sound.

State Senator Kevin Ranker led efforts to implement a permanent ban. He says the legislation was a direct result of last year's escape of 250,000 nonnative Atlantic salmon from Cooke Aquaculture's fish farm at Cyprus Island in the San Juan Islands. "Cooke Aquaculture made this happen. Their gross negligence, lies, and futile attempts to cover up the disaster resulted in the permanent ban," stated Ranker. Cooke initially blamed a solar eclipse and high tides for the collapse. However, a four-month investigation by three state agencies determined that the escape resulted from Cooke's negligence—namely, badly corroded anchor lines overgrown with tons of mussels, kelp, and other marine life. "Cooke knew this but chose to conceal the truth," Ranker concluded.

Reaction by the media and various organizations to the ban was swift. "This is a huge win for the public and an even greater win for wild fish," said Kurt Beardslee, executive director of Wild Fish Conservancy, a nonprofit that has sued Cooke over the net pen breach.

Following the signing of the ban, Cooke spokesman Joel Richardson said in a prepared statement, "While our company and our rural sea farming employees are deeply disappointed by the governor's decision to ignore the science and sign the bill, we will certainly respect the wishes of the legislature."

The state's remaining Atlantic salmon farms, once numbering as many as eight but now whittled down to four, all owned by Cooke, could be gone by as early as 2022, once their existing leases with the Washington Department of Natural Resources expire. Cooke, which raises salmon on three continents, has threatened to sue the state under the North American Free Trade Agreement to recover its investments.

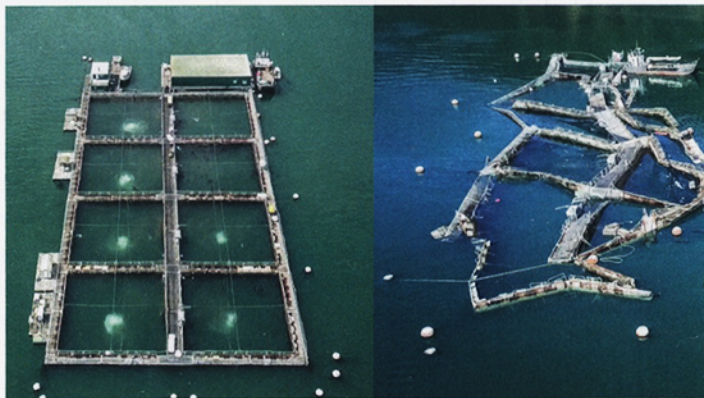


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