



Cooke Aquaculture Pacific announces major progress on Cypress Island incident response effort

The company also commits to ongoing work with state, federal and tribal partners

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(SEATTLE, Washington) – Cooke Aquaculture Pacific today announced it has concluded the initial stage of its response to the net-pen failure at its Cypress Island facility that occurred in late August and is sharing its plans for ongoing engagement in monitoring and mitigating any potential impacts of the incident that may arise.

“We deeply regret the failure at our Cypress Island farm over the summer, and we are taking every responsible step we can to make the situation right,” said Glenn Cooke, CEO of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific. “Cooke is committed to ensuring that any adverse consequences to the environment are identified and addressed, that compensation to the Coast Salish tribes that have aided in the recovery of escaped salmon is prompt and fair, and that the public, the region’s tribal communities, and our state agency partners can regain their trust in Cooke’s operations.”

The company’s initial response has focused on removal and disposal of the damaged structure, on recovery of the escaped fish and on the protection of native salmon stocks, while working closely with the Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Ecology, and tribal governments to achieve these goals.

“Our salvage operations have been successful and are completed,” said Innes Weir, general manager of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific. “All remnants of the failed structure have been removed and the sea bed appears clean and clear of farm equipment.”

To date, Cooke has accounted for 200,927 fish, including 145,851 fish recovered from the damaged structure, and 49,892 fish recovered through the company’s fish buy-back program, with significant help from several Coast Salish tribal communities. Cooke has made financial offers to Coast Salish tribes in excess of \$1.5 million for their recovery assistance efforts.

“We are tremendously grateful for the assistance from several Coast Salish tribes in the recovery of the escaped fish, especially given the deep concern that many tribal members have about potential impacts to native salmon runs in their ancestral waters,” said Cooke. “On the positive side, there is no evidence that any of the escaped fish from the Cypress Island incident are occupying native fish habitat or depleting native fish food supplies. We have inspected over five-hundred recovered fish stomachs, each of which was entirely empty of material.” These findings are consistent with previous inspections of escaped farmed salmon, who learn that ‘food’ comes in the form of pellets that drop from above at regular intervals, and prove to be incompetent at feeding themselves when released in the wild, Cooke said.

Cooke noted that multiple prior attempts by Washington state agencies to introduce Atlantic salmon into Pacific waters [have failed](#), as have attempts by the Canadian government, which [released over 8 million Atlantic salmon into Pacific waters](#) over the course of decades, with no colonization or interbreeding occurring as a result. In addition, despite highly publicized concerns, the escaped fish are generally not able to interbreed with native fish, said Cooke, as the escaped fish are three years of age, while sexual maturity is reached at four years of age.

Nevertheless, Cooke said the company understands concerns from the tribal communities about long-term impacts of the escaped fish in their tribal waters, and has offered to fund a study to evaluate any potential impacts that may arise.

“We want to work with the tribes on this,” said Cooke. “We have asked for the ongoing input and participation from several Coast Salish tribes in a scientific monitoring program that includes the selection of academic researchers, the sharing of real-time sampling and testing data, as well as consultation and coordination with their tribal fisheries experts. We have also offered to expand their expert capacity by funding some full-time positions within their tribal fisheries departments or at their tribal hatcheries.”

Cooke said this is only one of the many ways that the company’s work is ongoing, even after the conclusion of the initial recovery effort.

“We are continuing to work with all state, federal, and tribal agencies to ensure that this incident is not repeated,” said Cooke. “As a recent purchaser of this farm, we had already prioritized the facility for upgrade, and we have plans to spend significant amounts of capital over the next few years to upgrade all our facilities in Washington. We will continue to collaborate with state and federal agencies and our tribal partners to demonstrate the safety of our facilities, and we’ll also be sharing concepts from our experience in other regulatory environments throughout the world with lawmakers and regulators to enhance and strengthen the state’s regulatory framework for net-pen aquaculture.”

Cooke Aquaculture Pacific purchased the Cypress Island facility in summer of 2016, which was already stocked with fish. The company applied for a permit in February of 2017 to perform infrastructure upgrades after the fish were to be harvested in the fall of 2017.

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About Cooke Aquaculture Pacific

Cooke Aquaculture Pacific is a division of Cooke Aquaculture Inc. which has vertically integrated salmon farming operations in Canada, the USA (Maine and Washington), Scotland and Chile and employs approximately 5, 000 people worldwide. Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's 80 full-time farm employees have been farming an average of 13.4 years and the company supports another 100 jobs on harvesting boats and in processing plants. In the Puget Sound, Cooke Aquaculture Pacific puts \$8.5 million in wages into the local economy each year

The Cooke family also owns seafood companies; the Wanchese Fish Company, based in Virginia and North Carolina; Icicle Seafoods, Inc. in Alaska and a hake fishery, Cooke Uruguay. Aquaculture operations include land-based juvenile production, marine farms, processing and distribution facilities and a global sales and marketing team as well as a full value chain service and supply sector. In just over thirty years, Cooke has become a global seafood leader driven by an innovative team that delivers superior products, service, and value to its customers under the True North Seafood brand.

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