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March 5, 2012

WATER QUALITY PROGRAM
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

MAR 12 2012

To: WA Dept. of Ecology
Attn: Kathy Hamel
PO BOX 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Dear Ms. Hamel,

I would like to comment on the NPDES permit for our local oyster growers to kill Japanese Eel Grass on the oyster beds.

I retired several years ago and live north of Ocean Park and close to Willapa Bay. I have a long time friend that farms oysters. He has allowed me to dig butter clams, pick cockles, hunt for crabs, and take a few oysters for our home use on his beds north of Oysterville.

About 10 years ago I noticed the oyster beds were getting grassier, softer, and harder to walk on. The same as where we also went to dig little neck clams on public ground. I talked to my friend about why and he said it was Japanese Eelgrass moving in from some place and he was starting to worry about it.

Now and for the last 3 or 4 years it's gotten so bad that we don't even try to do it anymore and the public land we used to dig little necks on is the same way, it is grass and goo also.

I'm older, but still in pretty good shape. Where the ground was hard and sandy it has turned to a blanket of thick grass and goo. We used to spot clam holes easily but now there is nothing but a thick grass mat over the whole beds we used to walk on. There are nearly no cockles and there is no way you could find crab even if they were still there.

My friend and I talk a lot and he tells me the oystermen are trying to get permission to get this stuff off their beds and told me about a permit they were trying to get from the Dept. of Ecology. I know he'd like to do more on his ground like try growing littleneck clams but can't because of the grass and goo. He's stopped putting oysters on his upper beds where I used to go because they won't grow and fatten in the boggy grass anymore.

Willapa Bay is a great place, or used to be, and is the main reason we retired here. It is criminal to watch this grass and other outside stuff ruin this place when it doesn't have to.

For myself, my wife, and lots of others who came here for the same reasons, I'm asking you to help the oyster people who are taking this grass on.

Ralph Duane Miller
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