



THE TULALIP TRIBES

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The Tulalip Tribes are the successors in interest to the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, and Skykomish tribes and other tribes and band signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott

February 28, 2012

Governor Chris Gregoire
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

RE: Fish Consumption Rates and Rule-Making by the Department of Ecology

Dear Governor Gregoire,

Tulalip has been encouraged recently by the efforts of the Department of Ecology to work toward increasing fish consumption rates, and to more meaningfully protect public health from toxins contained in fish. These rates are used in the rules and regulations that govern the clean-up of contaminated sites and protection of water quality. We understand that the technical document that Ecology prepared on fish consumption rates has received numerous comments from industries, cities, environmental groups, state legislators, and tribes. We would like for you to understand the meaning that this effort has specifically to us, here at Tulalip.

As you probably know, fish have been an integral part of our traditional diet for a very long period of time. It does not surprise us that modern health experts have become so aware of the importance of fish in contributing to the health of the general public, and recommend that it be consumed in significant quantities by all. Many of those commenting to the Department of Ecology on this issue agreed that the existing standards are too low. We want to be able to eat fish at levels that are more consistent with our traditional diet and what public health experts recommend.

For Tulalip, as with many other tribes across the country, rates of diabetes, obesity and other chronic diseases have become epidemic among our people. In an effort to combat these alarming health trends, we have established several tribal programs aimed at encouraging individual tribal members to return to a healthier diet, including a diet richer in traditional foods -- in our area that means a lot of fish and shellfish.

It does not make sense to limit our fish consumption to keep us safe; rather we should limit the contaminants that go into our environment, and affect the safety and security of our food resources. We don't want to see the state go down this road -- having to limit the amount of air we can breathe, the amount of food we can consume, the amount of water we can drink in order to keep us safe. Instead, we advocate working harder to

promote clean industries, and strategies to assist industry so that they may thrive without placing our environment and the public health at risk. This is not a tribal issue—it is a public health issue with ramifications for all people of Washington.

Additionally, the state is fully aware the tribes have a right to take fish at all their usual and accustomed fishing grounds and stations. Implied in this right is a duty on the state of Washington to ensure that fish taken by the tribes is safe to eat. The right of tribes to take fish is not a meaningful right if eating the fish will harm them.

We have been working with the Department of Ecology and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for an improvement in water quality standards, including more accurate fish consumption rates, for over 20 years. In 1996, Tulalip initiated, with the Squaxin Island Tribe, a fish consumption survey to better document the actual rates of fish consumption by tribal members. This study, which was reviewed scientifically, indicates how much higher fish consumption rates are at Tulalip than those currently established for Washington. We believe that the framework that the DOE is developing has promise to achieve a more protective standard for fish consumption and public health, while providing industry with the certainty and tools they need in adapting to this cleaner standard. **We urge you to allow Ecology to proceed with their work without additional delay, and to move forward with its implementation.**

We appreciate your time and would be more than happy to meet with you if there is further information that we can provide. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Melvin Sheldon, Chair

Cc:

Senator Lisa Brown, Senate Majority Leader
Senator Mike Hewitt, Senate Minority Leader
Senator Karen Fraser, Majority Caucus Chair
Senator Linda Parlette, Minority Caucus Chair
Representative Frank Chopp, Speaker of the House
Representative Richard DeBolt, House Minority Leader
Representative Eric Pettigrew, Majority Caucus Chair
Representative Dan Kristiansen, Minority Caucus Chair