

Letter to the Editor – The Olympian. June 11, 2008

Shellfish industry is good for environment

The suppositions in Jules Michel's letter regarding geoduck farming are unfounded. The science is clear. Shellfish — including geoducks — clean our marine waters by the very act of feeding and shellfish farms support a myriad of marine flora and fauna. The science confirms this and shellfish growers observe it every day. I invite anyone to come visit our shellfish farms and judge for themselves

The vitriol surrounding geoduck farming is obscuring the real battle: The conflict over protecting real estate values and uninterrupted views for shoreline homeowners vs. farming. To couch this conflict in environmental terms is disingenuous and does a real disservice to the mission to clean up Puget Sound, and to the shellfish farmers who have a long history of environmental stewardship.

Michel's claims that geoduck aquaculture is unregulated in any meaningful way is also unfounded. Geoduck farms are required to obtain Army Corps permits, consultations with both U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Marine Fisheries Services under Endangered Species Act and essential fish habitat rules, and certifications and registrations under three state agencies: Ecology, Health, and Fish and Wildlife. Counties may also impose additional permits. Eighty percent of the seafood we consume in the U.S. already comes from foreign countries. Do we want to support that trend by eliminating shellfish farms in favor of development?

Robin Downey, executive director, Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association