



Seattle Human Rights Commission

1963 – 2015 • 52 years of championing human rights and fostering a just future

Resolution No. 15-02 – Calling on the City of Seattle to Urge Washington State to Revise its Water Quality Standards in a Manner Protective of Human Health and Human Rights

WHEREAS, all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights; and

WHEREAS, the Seattle Human Rights Commission (the “Commission”) is committed to protecting and advocating for justice, human rights, and the equal treatment of all people who live and work in Seattle; and

WHEREAS, the City of Seattle was declared to be a Human Rights City on December 10, 2012, committing itself to protect, respect, and fulfill the full range of inherent human rights for all as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous other international human rights treaties; and

WHEREAS, the right to health and the right to conditions that enable health are internationally-recognized human rights outlined in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; and

WHEREAS, Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the U.S. has ratified, and Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which the U.S. has signed, both provide that “in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence”; and

WHEREAS, Article 20(1) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples establishes and protects the right of indigenous peoples “to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence”; and

WHEREAS, a state’s fish consumption rate and cancer risk level are used to set safe and acceptable levels of pollutants that may be released into a state’s waters while still protecting the health of its citizens who consume fish harvested from the state’s waters; and

WHEREAS, a state’s fish consumption rate and cancer risk level directly impact a state’s water quality standards and human health criteria; and

WHEREAS, the State of Washington (the “State”) has a fish consumption rate of 6.5 grams per day (approximately one fish meal per month) and a cancer risk level of 10^{-6} (one in a million); and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Department of Health advises Washingtonians to consume two 226 gram servings of fish per week, a recommendation that substantially exceeds the State's existing 6.5 grams per day fish consumption rate; and

WHEREAS, contaminated fish are the primary pathway for human exposure to chemicals which cause cancer, irreversible neurological damage, and other harmful effects to human health and well-being; and

WHEREAS, the State's low fish consumption rate does not protect fish consumers from unsafe levels of toxics including but not limited to methyl mercury, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), and arsenic; and

WHEREAS, Seattle has a strong fish-oriented culture and economy; and

WHEREAS, Seattleites consume a great deal of fish, and should be able to do so free from fear of exposing themselves to harmful levels of toxics or to undue risk of cancer; and

WHEREAS, members of Asian and Pacific Islander communities in the State consume fish at a rate of 236 grams per day in the 90th percentile of those surveyed; and

WHEREAS, Lummi tribal members consume fish at the rate of 800 grams per day at the 90th percentile and the Spokane Tribe has set its fish consumption rate to 865 grams per day to reflect its members' true fish consumption rate; and

WHEREAS, fishing and the consumption of fish holds immense cultural value and is considered a subsistence right within *all communities* in Washington State and Seattle; and

WHEREAS, human rights and public health standards are meant to protect *all individuals*, especially those most vulnerable; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Department of Ecology ("DOE") has proposed to increase the State's fish consumption rate to 175 grams per day and to increase the cancer risk level tenfold from one in a million to one in 100,000; and

WHEREAS, almost thirty percent of the State population lives in King County; and

WHEREAS, DOE has scheduled three public hearings, all south of King County.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission hereby calls upon the Seattle Mayor and City Council to submit formal written comments before the March 23 comment deadline urging DOE to (1) move forward in resetting the State's fish consumption rate to 175 grams per day and (2) reject the tenfold increase to Washingtonians' cancer risk level.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Seattle Human Rights Commission hereby calls upon the Mayor and City Council to attend a public hearing on

the proposed changes in the fish consumption rate and the cancer risk level that the Commission has scheduled at Seattle City Hall (Bertha Knight Landes Room) on Tuesday, March 17 from 6 to 8 p.m (the “Seattle Public Hearing”).

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Seattle Human Rights Commission hereby calls upon the Mayor and City Council to formally request that DOE attend the Seattle Public Hearing.

Adopted by the Seattle Human Rights Commission on Thursday, March 5, 2015.



Ethel Branch, Co-Chair



Sarah Bishop, Co-Chair