

Frankenfish a disaster for Alaska salmon

COMPASS: Other points of view

By DAVE KUBIAK

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Alaska Sens. Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski are on the right track opposing the approval of transgenic salmon, or "Frankenfish," on at least two levels: economic and biological.

On the economic level, the approval of Frankenfish will have huge potential impacts on Alaska's wild salmon markets, which are at this point still recovering their profitability from the setbacks of the Exxon Valdez spill, which caused a huge loss of market share to farmed salmon. Yes, it takes that long to recover your market after having it torpedoed by an oil spill or by the confusion over the safety of a product. Confusion over safety and the inconsistent labeling of fish as to origin, species, or provenance leads consumers to buy something else, like chicken.

Alaska's salmon is a huge part of our state's economy, with hundreds of millions of dollars invested in boats, gear, processing plants, and other infrastructure. Guarding against Frankenfish is important to Alaska.

On the biological level, Frankenfish, if approved as the first transgenic agricultural product, will have far-reaching and unknown consequences for nature and for consumers. Mixing the genes of Atlantic salmon with that of an eelpout to promote accelerated growth (10 times faster than normal) is an "Island of Dr. Moreau" experiment that deserves much more scrutiny for the health of our environment and for the well being of consumers.

We have heard of the various doctored chemicals imported in foods and medicines, of the dangers of plasticizers in our bottles and food containers; what we do not need now are unknown and unproven biologicals in our food supply. Approval of Frankenfish will take us into the world of experimentation on new and recombined growth enzymes and genes; we need assurance that these biological compounds will not lead to effects on human health.

We are assured by the developer that these fish, so engineered, are such freaks of nature that they cannot survive in the wild, and yet we are supposed to accept them as wholesome food.

Support Sens. Begich and Murkowski in blocking approval of transgenic Frankenfish for Alaska's economic and public health.

Dave Kubiak is a former Kodiak salmon fisherman and current chairman of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council.