

Alaska governor's bill could add farm-raised seafood to ASMI portfolio

The term "wild" is central to the US state of Alaska's seafood marketing, differentiating it from the farm-raised seafood that has globally outpaced wild-caught harvests from salmon to shellfish in rapid fashion.

In fact, "wild" is the first word in the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) three-word slogan ("Wild, Natural & Sustainable").

But that excludes Alaska's growing mariculture sector – primarily oysters and seaweed – from being promoted by ASMI. The small agency, created by the state in 1981 as a public-private partnership, commands millions of dollars in state, federal and seafood industry support.

It makes sense in a state that banned finfish aquaculture in 1990 to resist opening Alaska waters to pen-raised salmon as neighbors British Columbia and Washington state did.

Alaska governor Mike Dunleavy recently introduced legislation that would relax the ban on finfish aquaculture to allow onshore fish farms – though not salmon – in a bid [he said is designed to increase food security](#). He's since followed up with additional legislation allowing ASMI to rep farm-raised shellfish and seaweed.

"This revision permits the marketing of propagated Alaskan aquatic plants and shellfish that are either native to state waters or lawfully imported under a permit," the governor's statement to lawmakers said of [HB135/SB131](#).

Who pays for it?

Alaska's mariculture industry broadly welcomes including its products in the state's marketing efforts. But it's divided on whether it would be wise to levy an assessment on mariculture production to pay for it.

State law allows a seafood sector to conduct a state-supervised election on whether to pass an assessment of 0.1% to 0.6% of its ex-vessel value to fund ASMI's promotional efforts.

Alaska mariculture is not uniform. Some oyster farmers say they struggle to feed the demand that already exists, while others, particularly in the seaweed industry, have more flexibility and are eager to tap into new markets.

"There's not consensus," Alaska Mariculture Alliance (AMA) executive director Jason Lessard told *Undercurrent News*, "unless we could approach the prospect of ASMI marketing mariculture products by having a vote per sector for their own participation."

That's because the bill put forward by the governor doesn't address the assessment question; it only removes the restrictions. As an executive-appointed marketing board, ASMI supports the governor's initiative, said executive director Jeremy Woodrow.

"These are new industries – they have a lot of opportunity," Woodrow told *Undercurrent*.

Hard data on the value of Alaska's mariculture industry is hard to come by, [according to analysts with McKinley Research](#), which reported last year that the seaweed harvest likely fell in 2024 while the oyster

harvest increased.

Still, harvests in both sectors are projected to increase in 2025.

A big if

If the governor's bill gains traction in the state legislature (the first hearing is on March 27) there are expectations that lawmakers could amend it.

"Additional language would need to be introduced as an amendment to create an assessment for mariculture products or to connect mariculture products to the existing seafood marketing assessment," Woodrow added.

The question of ASMI promoting mariculture has been brought up in the past. Industry sources say the governor's office didn't coordinate with the AMA before introducing the bills.

But last month at AMA's general meeting in Sitka, the question was debated with 87% of its membership passing a resolution supporting including mariculture products in ASMI's portfolio with the caveat that the two main sectors – shellfish and seaweed – would be polled separately whether they would be assessed to pay for state-run marketing support.

"They feel there's enough difference amongst themselves that there's a warrant to having a vote split by sector," Lessard said.

If the bills did become law – and that's a big if considering the political sensitivities around Alaska's wild seafood identity – and ASMI began representing mariculture products, it would require rebranding its central sloganeering around "wild seafood."

ASMI's executive director said it's a conversation Alaska's marketing board is beginning to have.

"We've only had internal conversations," Woodrow said. "Obviously, we can't call them wild."

Contact the author jacob.resneck@undercurrentnews.com

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