

Anchorage Rep. Tarr Seeks Canadian Support on GE Salmon

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Rep. Garran Tarr

Jay Barrett/KMXT

An Anchorage legislator made a trip this week to the far reaches of the Canadian Maritime Province of Prince Edward Island to raise awareness about what she sees as the detrimental affects of genetically-engineered salmon. Representative Garran Tarr, a Democrat from District 17, introduced the "No Frankenfish" resolution that passed the State Legislature this year.

She said she was invited to speak on Prince Edward Island, because Aqua Bounty has a laboratory there which will produce the genetically modified salmon eggs.

"I met with their premier and spoke with him about our concerns, health concerns, the threat to our wild Alaska salmon stock and the potential negative impacts on the fishing industry," she said. "And he had an open ear; I felt like it was a very productive meeting. I also met with members of their opposition party and shared the same information. We basically asked them to speak out in opposition."

Asking anyone to speak out against potential economic development is always a chore, but she said the people of Prince Edward Island already has one thriving industry, which might be harmed by hosting the genetics lab.

"Their tourist industry is quite big there, and I think they had a lot of concerns that should this application be approved there could be an adverse... you know, negative impacts to their tourism industry," Tarr said. "Because what your average Prince Edward Islander doesn't want is for their cute little island to be known as 'The Home of the Frankenfish.'"

Tarr says she has a background in biology, and has kept a close eye on genetically modified foods in general.

"I am a strong supporter of the fishing industry. It's our number two industry and provides thousands of jobs annually, and I think in 2012 the wild salmon industry was about a half-a-billion dollars of state revenue. So I have an interest in making sure we have a thriving fishery," said. "And if we look to history, what happened when farmed salmon came on the market our wild Alaska salmon took a big hit in terms of the price. And over the almost last two decades now, we've been funding ASMI and other organizations in promoting our wild Alaska salmon, and the good news is right now the number two recognized brand on restaurants in the United States is wild Alaska salmon."

Tarr

says the trip was timely, as Friday is the deadline to make comments to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration about Aqua Bounty's modified salmon. If the FDA approves its sale, it will be the first genetically engineered meat product approved for human consumption. In addition, there are no laws requiring the product to be labeled as genetically modified.

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