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Blue Evolution is one Alaska's growing commercial seaweed producers. Photo: Blue Evolution

Alaska leaders remain wary of offshore aquaculture bill, despite seaweed interest

In the past two years, the state has seen growing interest in aquatic farming projects.

by
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May 31st, 2019 12:34 GMT

Alaska seafood leaders are wary that the state's budding mariculture industry could be negatively impacted by a looming bill in Congress that would establish a federal system for regulating and permitting offshore aquaculture farms in the United States.

Julie Decker, who heads the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF), said during an Alaska Mariculture Task Force meeting last week she was nervous about public perception surrounding the federal bill, which she said could bleed into perception surrounding Alaska's own aquaculture efforts.

"There are benefits, but I'm really nervous about detrimental effects," she told members of the task force, which discussed issues that included how to further promote its growing mariculture industry, as well as as handle the influx of applications for seaweed and oyster farming in the state, the most recent coming from Trident Seafoods.

For years Alaska officials have been resistant to offshore aquaculture, fearing the negative impacts it could have on wild, commercial fisheries.



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Last February the task force, along with Alaska's Congressional Delegation, sent a letter to Alaska's Governor stating the bill was "highly compatible with the goal and recommendations of the Task Force in the comprehensive plan for promoting and developing shellfish and seaweed mariculture in Alaska," but stated there needs to be stronger language that could allow states such as Alaska to opt out of the legislation.

A revised version of the bill is slated to be introduced this year and reportedly includes an opt-out provision for Alaska, according to Decker.

Earlier in May Alaska Congressman Don Young introduced the Keep Fin Fish Free Act, legislation prohibiting the Secretary of Interior and the Secretary of Commerce from authorizing commercial finfish aquaculture operations in the Federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) unless specifically authorized by Congress.