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SB 25 Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to labeling and identification of genetically modified fish and fish products.”

Transgenic foods are those in which the genetic structure has been altered at the molecular level by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes. There has been widespread concern throughout the world over the largely unknown effects of transgenic, or genetically modified (GM) products on human and environmental health.

In an effort to address concerns raised by consumer, environmental, health, and Alaska fish marketing groups, SB 5 requires Alaska retailers to identify and label foods containing fish and shellfish, or fish and shellfish products that have been genetically modified.

The message that Alaska seafood is more natural than seafood that has been engineered or bred is a highly important marketing tool. This bill, by requiring a differentiation between GM and wild seafood helps highlight Alaska seafood as distinct from GM seafood, thereby doing away with any vagueness that may exist to the consumer when purchasing seafood without labeling, and reinforcing the natural message.

Many GM agricultural products are currently allowed on the U.S. market, and an application submitted by an aquaculture company for the use of a GM, growth-enhanced salmon is pending before the Food and Drug Administration’s Center For Veterinary Medicine. The Pacific Fisheries Legislative Task Force *Fish Review* dated December 2004 reports that Aqua Bounty, a biotechnology company with offices in the United States and Canada, is planning to ask Canadian authorities for approval to use GM fish in Canada’s fish farms.

Currently, legislation in the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia requires labeling on foods made from, or containing GM products. SB 5 is similar to legislation introduced in other states, such as Oregon and California, and it comes with the unanimous support of the Joint Legislative Salmon Industry Task Force, a committee comprised of legislators, seafood harvesters and seafood processors.