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October 11, 2004

The Honorable Gordon Campbell  
Premier of British Columbia  
Box 9041; Station PROV GOVT  
Victoria, British Columbia  
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CANADA

Dear Premier Campbell: 

Over the last 18 months, you and I have worked closely together on major projects ranging from a potential railway extension to a gas pipeline. During this time, we have learned that the enduring partnership between the State of Alaska and the Province of British Columbia is not just a function of our close geographical proximity to one another. Rather, our close ties are based upon a solid foundation of common goals, which include economic development. While we still have more work to do, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your exemplary leadership and continued cooperation.

It is in the spirit of this cooperation that I am writing to express my concern regarding your government's decision to allow new sablefish farming operations in British Columbia without first assessing the potential economic, social, and environmental impacts of sablefish farming.

As you may know, government officials in British Columbia recently issued 47 licenses that will allow finfish farmers to expand their operations to include the farming of sablefish in saltwater net pens. However, these licenses were issued without first conducting the socio-economic and environmental assessments necessary to analyze the risks that sablefish farming might pose for the natural stocks; or the effects of sablefish farming on existing fisheries and fishery-dependent communities.

As your neighbor, the State of Alaska understands British Columbia's need to develop its resource-based economy. Yet, this same geographical proximity, which fosters understanding, causes me great concern as I consider the potential danger that sablefish farmed in British Columbia may pose to Alaska's wild stocks and fisheries.

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Natural sablefish stocks may be susceptible to disease transfer from, or predation by, farmed fish, and current research shows that sablefish migrate between British Columbia and Alaska. Consequently, impacts in British Columbia on wild sablefish stocks may translate into effects in Alaska. Given the migratory patterns of sablefish; British Columbia's close proximity to Alaska; and, the lack of information on the potential for disease transfer, genetic interaction, or predation, I am worried that sablefish farming will adversely impact Alaska's valuable wild sablefish stocks.

Alaska's economy relies heavily upon our fishery resources and I want to make sure that our neighbor's activities do not adversely impact those fisheries. Therefore, I would urge you to delay the start of black cod fish farming in British Columbia until:

1. adequate research is conducted to determine the industry's potential impacts on marine environments and fishery resources;
2. socio-economic studies are completed that will define the impact of sablefish farming on existing fisheries and fishery-dependent communities; and,
3. the Canadian fish farming industry develops and employs the technology necessary to prevent any harmful interaction between natural stocks and farmed fish. Given the high stakes involved for both the State of Alaska and British Columbia, I would ask that you pursue a careful science-based look at the potential impacts before allowing sablefish farming.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I am confident that by working together and using sound science, we can find a way to simultaneously develop both of our resource-based economies in a manner that will not adversely affect one another. As always, I look forward to continued cooperation with you on this and other issues.

Sincerely yours,



Frank H. Murkowski  
Governor