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Canadians deserve to know if genetically modified salmon is masquerading as Atlantic salmon

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Vancouver, B.C. and Halifax, N.S. - SeaChoice member organizations, Living Oceans Society and the Ecology Action Centre, have teamed up for a court challenge of the federal government's approval of genetically modified (GM) Atlantic salmon. The case is scheduled to be heard on November 17 and 18, 2015.

In a process cloaked in secrecy, Environment Canada approved the production of a GM salmon in late 2013. Health Canada, who has not yet approved GM salmon for human consumption in Canada, is the last barrier to the large scale development of the fish. Canada is the first country to provide such an approval. The GM AquAdvantage salmon, created by AquaBounty, are currently being produced on Prince Edward Island. If approved for consumption, there is concern that this GM salmon will enter into the Canadian and United States markets, making this the first genetically-modified animal for human consumption in the world. In addition to lack of information about human health impacts, there are grave issues for the environment.

"Wild Atlantic salmon are already an endangered species due to historic overfishing and habitat loss," said Catharine Grant, Marine Policy Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax. "GM Atlantic salmon grow faster than natural salmon. If they were to ever escape, they would add pressure to the wild salmon by out-competing them for food. Even worse, interbreeding could occur, and the genetics of wild Atlantic salmon risk being changed forever."

Ecojustice lawyers, who are representing Living Oceans and Ecology Action Centre, will argue that the approval is unlawful because it failed to assess whether GM salmon could become invasive, potentially putting ecosystems and species such as wild salmon at risk. SeaChoice members are calling on Canadians to voice their concern against GM Atlantic salmon being raised in Canada, and asking seafood businesses to publically commit to not ever sell GM salmon.

The GM AquAdvantage salmon was engineered by introducing a growth hormone gene from Pacific Chinook salmon and genetic material from ocean pout (an eel-like species) into the eggs of Atlantic salmon. AquaBounty claims that it grows faster than other farmed or wild salmon. AquaBounty plans to grow the genetically modified salmon eggs in P.E.I. and then transport them to Panama, where they will grow to full size. However, the approval would also allow the manufacture and grow out of the genetically modified salmon elsewhere in Canada under certain conditions.

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