



# Genuine Alaska Pollock

## A Model for Sustainable Fisheries Management

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Is Alaska pollock sustainable?

The largest fishery in the United States, the Alaska pollock fishery is one of the most consistently productive and stable fisheries in the world. For over 30 years, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) has managed the Alaska pollock fishery on a precautionary basis, resulting in annual harvests averaging 2.5 billion pounds – all on a sustainable basis.

The Alaska pollock fishery is recognized by fisheries management experts and independent environmental organizations as one of the most sustainably managed fisheries in the world. Both the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska pollock fisheries have been certified as sustainably managed by the independent Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). Alaska pollock products are also identified as the best environmental choice for seafood consumers by major environmental organizations, including The Monterey Bay Aquarium, The Blue Ocean Institute and Environmental Defense. In addition, the Conservation for Seafood Solutions, a coalition of 13 North American environmental groups, recognizes the MSC program as credible and recommends that businesses purchase MSC-certified products, such as Alaska pollock, as part of their sustainability programs. The Alaska pollock fishery also meets all of the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries developed by the Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



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**Please note:** The above references and all following information applies only to Alaska pollock harvested in Alaska. Russian pollock, which is sometimes marketed under the name “Alaska pollock,” is managed by the Russian government under a separate management system.

#### **I’ve read about other fisheries that are in trouble. How do we know that the Alaska pollock fishery will remain healthy and well-managed?**

The management system for Alaska pollock is designed to avoid the types of failures that have been experienced in other fisheries. First of all, Alaska pollock is managed on a scientific basis. Good scientific data has been collected for decades and quotas are always set at or below the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), the number that scientists determine can be sustainably harvested. Because the management system is precautionary, scientists set the ABC at a fraction of the total adult

population (or biomass) of Alaska pollock. In recent years this has averaged only 15 to 20 percent of total biomass. In addition, there is a two million metric ton cap on groundfish harvests in the Bering Sea, which adds a precautionary ecosystem-based approach that complements conservative single stock management. The management of the Alaska pollock fishery includes numerous additional progressive measures, such as full observer coverage, complete weighing of all catch, real-time reporting of catch data, and GPS vessel monitoring systems. Many other fisheries are just moving to these innovative management practices. This comprehensive scientific approach is why Alaska is held up as the model for fisheries management around the world.

**I have heard that pollock stocks in Alaska are down. Should I be concerned?**

The scientists who study the Alaska pollock fishery have noted a decline in juvenile pollock for the last few years. Because Alaska pollock is managed in a very precautionary way, the scientists recommended decreases in the fishing quota in 2008 and 2009 and both were approved by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The scientists' analysis of the 2009 pollock stock assessment indicates that pollock stocks are roughly where scientists expected them to be, based on population estimates made last year. In addition, surveys suggest a large 2006 year class of pollock. These fish will begin to contribute to the spawning stock in 2009 and ensure the biomass remains at healthy levels.

Fisheries scientists attribute normal fluctuations in the stock to changes in ocean conditions and predation. Water temperatures have been colder than normal over the past few years, and thus are less conducive to Alaska pollock populations thriving in the ecosystem. Juvenile pollock are also consumed by fish, including adult pollock, marine mammals and seabirds. The fishery saw the same sort of fluctuations in Alaska pollock populations from 1998-2000 and the stocks rebounded to record levels from 2002-2004 as environmental conditions became more favorable.

**I am concerned about marine mammals and hear that Steller sea lions eat pollock. How do fishery managers address this?**

The management plan for Alaska pollock takes into account the entire ecosystem, including the food needs of marine mammals. Scientists have observed declines in Steller sea lion populations for decades, and the U.S. government has spent almost \$200 million on research but has been unable to identify the cause of the decline. Recent population surveys show the populations are now stabilizing. Although the exact cause for the decline has not been pinpointed, precautionary measures were implemented to ensure that fishing does not impede recovery of the Steller sea lion population. Mitigation measures include fishery closures in areas around rookeries and haul out sites to minimize competition for prey. The Alaska pollock industry has also provided funding for additional research on marine mammals to assist the government scientists in their evaluation.

### **How does the pollock fishery impact Alaska Native communities?**

Although Alaska pollock has never been a part of a subsistence diet in Western Alaska, the Alaska Native communities there benefit greatly from the pollock fishery. In 1992, these communities were granted Community Development Quotas (CDQs) equal to 10 percent of the total Alaska pollock fishery. Most CDQ groups have teamed up with seafood companies to harvest and process this quota, and the royalties, some \$30 million a year, flow back to 65 Western Alaska communities. The villages use this money for economic development, and many have chosen to invest further in the Alaska pollock industry, and now own pollock catcher boats and catcher/processors.

### **Does the Alaska pollock fishery have problems with bycatch?**

Bycatch, the capture of non-targeted species, in the midwater trawl Alaska pollock fishery is extremely low compared to other fisheries in the world, averaging 1% of the total catch. Of that small percentage, much of the non-targeted species are processed and utilized.

Some fish, such as salmon, are considered “prohibited species” and are required to be discarded or donated to hunger relief programs. In 2007, changing ocean patterns caused the appearance of salmon in some areas where they have not historically been found, which in turn resulted in an increased salmon bycatch. The industry has been very proactive in working to reduce the number of salmon that are caught, and the numbers in 2008 were down dramatically. For the past decade, pollock fishermen have funded SeaState, a program that takes real-time bycatch data from the boats and alerts the fleet to potential salmon “hot spots.” By working in real time, fishermen can move out of these areas before additional salmon are caught. A number of fishing companies also donate their bycatch to SeaShare, a non-profit organization started by industry members that ensures this bycatch will be used to feed the hungry and that it will not go to waste.

### **What is the overall outlook for Alaska pollock?**

The Alaska pollock stock is plentiful and the fishery is sustainably managed. Seafood manufacturers and consumers can be confident that the species will be abundant for generations to come.

### **For more information contact:**

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