

# Pollock quotas cut, groups say not enough

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by Mike Hinman  
for the *Tundra Times*

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The North Pacific Fishery Management Council set the 1997 Bering Sea pollock quota five percent lower than last year's allowable catch.

The harvest quota will drop from 1.19 million metric tons to 1.13 million metric tons as recommended by the council's scientific advisors.

The reductions fall far short of those called for by the Alaska Marine Conservation Council and Greenpeace. The AMCC called for a quota of about 850,000 metric tons, compared to the 714,000 to 773,500 metric ton quota recommended by Greenpeace .

"We don't think (the reduction) went far enough in regard to the ecosystem," said Fran Bennis, the AMCC's project coordinator. "We see an ecosystem under (nutritional) stress."

The NPFMC and the environmental groups used the same data, but came up with different conclusions for a highly-studied fishery.

"A good portion of the Alaska Fishery Science Center staff concentrate their efforts on pollock and related (issues)," said Dave Witherell, a staff biologist with the NPFMC.

While overall harvest quotas will drop, the community development quota (CDQ) allocations of pollock remain the

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same at 7.5 percent, with the "A" and "B" fisheries dividing the remaining 92.5 percent. The distribution has remained the same since 1991.

The CDQ program gives coastal communities an allocation of the fishery to help provide funds for other community development projects. The communities typically lease out their portion of the catch to one of the 60-plus large catcher-processors that participate in the fishery.

In addition to the direct income from the leasing of their harvest share, there are the added benefits of training and employment of the local labor force that

allows further participation of the communities.

"It is not a small boat fishery; by definition, it is a large boat fishery; by definition, it is a trawl fishery," said Mary McBurney of the Western Alaska Fisheries Development Association.

Pollock was the first species targeted by the CDQ program, halibut and sablefish have since been added. These are more conducive to smaller boats allowing a shore-based fishing industry to develop in participating communities.

The CDQ allocation of pollock produced about \$20 million last year, according to McBurney. The five percent reduc-

tion in this year's overall catch quota could mean the loss of a million dollars to the CDQs in direct revenue and more in pay for the workers.

One group, which McBurney didn't identify, said that the reduction in this year's catch will translate to \$100,000 in lost revenue.

One of the main worries of the AMCC is that in the mid-1980s, there were multi-year classes of fish (a fish class is the year the fish were spawned) to draw from while this year's fishery will rely primarily on the 1992 fish class.

Bennis said that by their own estimates, the scientists predict that the harvest quota for 1998 will be only 640,000 metric tons,

unless they find another class of fish.

If those predictions hold true, the contribution of the fishery to coastal communities will drop from \$20 million last year to just over \$10 million.

The "A" fishery that starts January 20 is primarily a roe fishery. The "B," or fall, fishery gets its prime money from surimi and filets.

The NPFMC sets quotas and fishing policy for the U.S. territorial waters that extend from the three-mile state fishing limit to the 200-mile limit.

The pollock quota is based on an 18 percent exploitation rate of the biomass of the fishery, according to Bennis.