



Contact: Sheela McLean
907-586-7032
Sheela.Mclean@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 20, 2008

NOAA Finds Decline in Pollock; Recommends Catch Cut to Council

NOAA has released new scientific information showing a decline in the walleye pollock biomass that has the agency recommending a cut to the pollock catch for 2009 in the eastern Bering Sea.

“Although the pollock biomass was well above average in the 1990s, our surveys show a substantial decline in recent years,” said Doug DeMaster, science and research director for NOAA’s Alaska Fisheries Science Center. “The stock has been closely monitored and management decisions have historically followed sound conservation principles. We anticipate lower catch limits for 2009.”

A 2008 bottom trawl survey of pollock numbers was in line with last year’s analysis, but another survey that combined information from acoustic measurements of pollock biomass and midwater trawl results showed lower abundance than expected. These results have prompted NOAA scientists to recommend to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council a sustainable catch of 815,000 metric tons for 2009, an 18.5 percent reduction from 2008. The new scientific information on pollock comes from major scientific surveys this season, plus catch data and oceanographic information.

The council will review and discuss NOAA’s recommendation at its December meeting and make its recommendation to NOAA’s Fisheries Service for the total allowable catch of pollock for 2009.

Although recent surveys show the biomass has declined, there is some optimism about the future of the stock.

“The prognosis for 2010 is for improved stock levels because 2006 was a more successful year for the hatching and survival of young pollock,” said Jim Ianelli, a stock assessment scientist at the NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center. “The 2009 surveys will play a critical role in monitoring and in later management decisions.”

The eastern Bering Sea pollock fishery is known for its strong management, conservative catch levels, near real-time reporting and high numbers of fishery observers who track catch levels and any bycatch of other marine species. The fishery uses pelagic trawls which minimize disturbance of the bottom habitat and decrease the accidental catch of other species. The most valuable part of the fishery is roe. Regulations allow no more than 40 percent of the total catch to be taken during the roe season.

NOAA scientists recently presented the draft pollock stock assessment to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Groundfish Plan Team, which is reviewing the assessment and compiling the report for the council. The council’s scientific and statistical committee will recommend an acceptable biological catch level – a sustainable catch level– and the advisory panel will recommend a total allowable catch, which is historically lower because it takes into account other factors. After listening to committee recommendations and public input, the council will recommend a total allowable catch for pollock for 2009.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

On the Web:

Pollock: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/>

Draft assessment: ftp://ftp.afsc.noaa.gov/afsc/public/Plan_Team/draft_assessments.htm

NOAA's Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>