## MIXED POLLOCK A-SEASON RESULTS IN ALASKA AND RUSSIA

### *Alaska*

The pollock fleet in the Bering Sea caught the last of its A-season quota over the last week, meaning that approximately 40% of Alaska's 2008 pollock production is now either on the market or in the pipeline. The B-season in the Bering Sea receives 60% of the annual pollock quota and will open on June 10th.

As expected, the 28% cut to the 2008 Bering Sea pollock quota dominated the conduct of the fishery. The ultra-efficient fishery routinely catches close to 100% of its quota, so we can expect final catch volume will be down from last year by the same 28% figure after all of the fish cross the docks. But the inshore and catcher-processor components also cut their effort slightly to stretch the quota into mid-March, as shown in the following table:

| **COMPARISON OF BERING SEA POLLOCK A-SEASON, 2007-08** *all figures in metric tons (MT) unless otherwise noted* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A-Season Details** | **2007** | **2008** | **% change** |
| ***Season end date*** | | | |
| Inshore | 24-Mar-07 | 18-Mar-08 | |
| Catcher-processor | 20-Mar-07 | 15-Mar-08 | |
| Mothership | 24-Mar-07 | 02-Mar-08 | |
| ***Fishing days*** | | | |
| Inshore | 63 | 58 | (7.9%) |
| Catcher-processor | 59 | 55 | (6.8%) |
| Mothership | 63 | 42 | (33.3%) |
| ***Catch**** | | | |
| Inshore | 243,894 | 173,700 | (28.8%) |
| Catcher-processor | 195,115 | 138,960 | (28.8%) |
| Mothership | 48,779 | 34,740 | (28.8%) |
| ***Average weekly catch rate*** | | | |
| Inshore | 27,099 | 20,964 | (22.6%) |
| Catcher-processor | 23,149 | 17,686 | (23.6%) |
| Mothership | 5,420 | 5,790 | 6.8% |

For the inshore and catcher-processor components, the 28% quota cut only translated into a 7-8% drop in A-season fishing days, a result of the lower average weekly catch rates in 2008.

Mothership vessels behaved differently, increasing their catch rates and filling their quota three weeks earlier than last year.

### *Russia*

On balance, the pollock A-season in Russia has proceeded well. The Russian press reports the fleet in the Sea of Okhotsk – the main pollock fishing grounds – has caught approximately 400,000MT, a 9% increase from catch numbers at the same point last year. Fishers in the smaller Bering Sea fishery have not enjoyed the same success, catching only 28,000MT to date, a big drop from the same point last year.

Nonetheless the increased catch in the Sea of Okhotsk means that Russia is on pace to match Alaska's pollock production in 2008 at approximately 1 million MT. In recent years Alaska's pollock harvest has outstripped Russia's by 30-40%.

On the negative side, Russia's fisheries are struggling with some problems. Record oil prices have affected fishing fleets throughout the world, but especially large, obsolete, inefficient vessels such as those that dominate the Russian fleet.

The inshore fishery has been able to adjust to higher fuel prices without affecting catches. But observers worry that vessels in the more fuel-dependent offshore fishery will cut their effort or even forego the fishery.

Many Russian vessels sell their catch in US dollars, so fuel costs are increasing as revenues decrease. Some vessels are reportedly trying to sell their catch to Japanese buyers for yen to limit their currency losses.

Poaching remains another major concern for Russia's Far East fisheries. The Russian government has conducted extensive anti-poaching operations during the A-season for the last three years. In Sakhalin state alone, authorities seized 75 fishing vessels in 2007. But authorities still believe that illegally caught pollock represents a significant proportion of Russian pollock exports.

Sources: NMFS, BANR Japan, Urner Barry

*Implications for frozen seafood buyers:*

- Rising world fuel costs and quota cuts in Alaska will keep upward pressure on pollock prices for 2008.
- The weak US dollar will further hurt US buyers' purchasing power relative to European and Japanese buyers.

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