IDENTIFICATION

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Gadus macrocephalus

SPECIES NAME(S)
Pacific cod

COMMON NAMES
cod, codfish, gray cod, Pacific cod, P-cod

STOCK IDENTIFICATION

Pacific cod in the eastern North Pacific are distributed from the Pacific Rim and southward to Southern California (Gustafson 2000). Pacific cod belonging to this “North American” stock group (Grant et al. 1987) have been understood to be more genetically homogeneous relative to their western North Pacific counterpart, known as the “Asian” stock group. Significant migration of Pacific cod is known to occur within and between the Eastern Bering Sea (EBS), Aleutian Islands (AI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) regions. However, a body of research performed since Grant et al.’s 1987 analysis indicates that genetically distinct stocks do exist in the EBS and the AI region (Thompson 2014). Beginning in 2013, these two stocks have been assessed independently (Thompson 2013; Thompson and Palsson 2013), and Pacific Cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) are no longer managed as a single unit. As such, there are now two unique FishSource profiles dedicated to these units; the Aleutian Islands Pacific cod profile can be found here. There is an additional Alaskan profile group for Pacific cod in the Gulf of Alaska. There are also commercially managed fisheries in Canada in Hecate Straight, Queen Charlotte Sound, and the West Coast of Vancouver Island.

For Pacific cod in the western North Pacific, see Asian stock group profiles: Sea of Okhotsk, Karaginsky, Petropavlovsk-Komondor, W Bering Sea, and Yellow Sea.

RELATED LINKS:
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
- North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC)
- Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC)

ASSESSMENT

Strengths

Spawning biomass for Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands cod has been maintaining above its target level in recent years, and is expected to continue increasing. Total allowable catches are consistently set below scientists’ acceptable biological catch limits (limits were 239 and 255 t respectively for 2015), and catch compliance has been strong. The fishery is independently monitored and reviewed to maintain MSC certification held by some participants. Management measures are in place to limit impacts on protected species and habitats. Research is continuing to evaluate effectiveness of these protective measures, and the need for additional measures.

The pot fishery for Pacific cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) is MSC certified.

Weaknesses

1) Cod fisheries may compete with Steller sea lions for food (however, this potential impact is mitigated by management measures). 2) Components of the fishery employ bottom contact gear, which can damage benthic habitats (however, there are protections and limitations in place to mitigate those impacts). 3) Budget cuts in past years limited portions of the normal stock assessment surveys. Analysis indicates that further reductions in survey effort will hinder groundfish management capabilities, with potential adverse impacts to the biological and economical stability of the fishery. 4) Oceanographic research indicates that acidification (driven by global CO2 emissions) is progressing rapidly in the Bering Sea and other high-latitude waters, potentially undercutting future fishery productivity.

Options

1) Support ongoing research to assess the vulnerability of ecologically sensitive areas, and any further provisions (if needed) to adequately preserve critical areas. 2) Advocate restoration of survey funding to ensure a firm scientific foundation for fishery management. 3) Support monitoring and research on ocean acidification and its potential impacts on fisheries in Alaska, and policies to restrain the emissions that drive this problem.

SCORES

Management Quality:

Managers Compliance: 10
Fishers Compliance: 10

Stock Health:

Current Health: 9
Future Health: 7.5

FIPS

No related FIPs

MSC

- Alaska Pacific cod - Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands: MSC Recertified

RECOMMENDATIONS

RETAILERS & SUPPLY CHAIN

Monitor the performance of the fishery and its management to ensure the fishery continues to be eligible for condition-free MSC re-certification.