Pollock Target Up for 2014

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Lauren Rosenthal/KUCB

Fishermen will be able to harvest a little more pollock from the Bering Sea next year.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council voted to bump up the catch limit to 1.267 million metric tons at a meeting in Anchorage last week.

That limit is about 1 percent higher than this year's. Representatives from the fishing industry lobbied for an even bigger pollock harvest.

Donna Parker is with the Arctic Storm Management Group, a pollock fishing company. She told the council the Bering Sea fleet found an immense amount of fish this year – so much that they went slightly over their catch limit.

“It’s not always going to be like this, and in fact, not too long ago, we lost a half a million metric tons because the pollock stock had declined. Well, now it’s back up. It’s incredible,” she said. “Please let us have access to it.”

About three years ago, the pollock stock took a major hit. The fish didn’t seem to be reproducing as much, and many fishermen were struggling to fill their quotas.

Setting a safe harvest limit was a challenge for the North Pacific council.

Now, stock assessments show that Bering Sea pollock seem to have recovered.

There are plenty of other kinds of fish that get harvested out there, like yellowfin sole and northern rock sole, and according to federal law, the total groundfish catch in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands cannot exceed 2 million metric tons. So, in order to bump up the pollock limit, the council had to reduce the harvest for other groundfish.

Glenn Reid, from the Pacific Seafood Processors Association, said that industry members had a tough time negotiating among themselves about the fish they could cut back on. Reid said the council -- which is made of industry stakeholders and resource managers -- struggled with it too.

“It’s not just us who argue over very small amounts. It also happens around the table up there. So I think it’s clear that little bits do mean a lot, and they mean a lot to different participants in these fisheries,” he said. “That’s why it’s so hard to come up with a number.”

Council member Craig Cross, of Aleutian Spray Fisheries, proposed the final harvest limits.

All 11 members of the board voted to approve the plan.