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## CONGRESS CHANGES THE MARKET NAME OF THE NATION'S LARGEST FISHERY

Seafood consumers across the nation gained more certainty about the source of the seafood they buy as part of the federal omnibus spending bill that Congress passed and the President signed on Friday. The law changes the market name of the nation's largest fishery from "Alaska pollock" to "pollock," and also requires that the geographic descriptor "Alaska" be used only on pollock harvested from that state.

The new law corrects decades of consumer and market confusion over the use of the market name "Alaska pollock" on the species *Gadus chalcogrammus* regardless of its origin. Before the law was enacted, pollock from both Russia and Alaska were sold in the United States under the name "Alaska pollock," making it impossible for consumers to determine product origin and to make a choice between the two sources.

The provision in the omnibus spending package was pushed by U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA) and U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), who introduced stand-alone bills to change the law, bills co-sponsored by all members of the Washington and Alaska Congressional delegations. U.S. Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), who serve on the Senate Appropriations Committee, played key roles in securing inclusion of the pollock nomenclature provision in the end of year catch-all spending bill.

Alaska pollock is the fifth most consumed fish in the United States. "In 2013, 152 million pounds of Russian pollock, which is less sustainable and lower quality than pollock from Alaska fisheries, was sold to U.S. consumers as "Alaska pollock," said Pat Shanahan, Program Director for the Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers, the industry trade association that initiated the name change. "Our research showed that

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the vast majority of consumers thought products labeled “Alaska pollock” came from Alaska, and they felt the name was very misleading when applied to Russian pollock,” she added.

Russian pollock now makes up over 40 percent of the pollock available to U.S. consumers, so the change will provide a boost to Alaska’s pollock producers, who have been struggling in a tough domestic market. From 2007 to 2014, the consumption of Alaska pollock in the United States declined by more than 40 percent. The Genuine Alaska Pollock Producers believes that the inferior quality of Russian-origin pollock reprocessed in China is one of the primary reasons for this decline.

“Because we haven’t been able to distinguish our products from lower priced pollock from Russia, the price of Alaska pollock has been kept artificially low,” said Shanahan. Over the past eight years, the price premium that once-frozen Alaska pollock has held over twice-frozen, Russian-caught product that has been processed in China has declined. In 2007, it was 35 percent. In 2015, it is only 18 percent. “With this new law, we will be able to associate the better quality and world class sustainability of Alaska pollock with a name that is truthful and easily recognizable for consumers. Hopefully, that will result in better seafood for consumers and better market conditions for our producers,” she added.

“Alaska pollock producers will be moving next to seek changes in EU labeling requirements so that superior quality, sustainably managed Alaska pollock is transparently identified in one our largest export markets,” noted Shanahan. “Congress’ action helps immeasurably in promoting truth in labeling domestically, now we need to explore our options for overseas consumers who also deserve to know the provenance of their seafood,” concluded Shanahan.

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