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**MSC certification of Gulf of Alaska cod reinstated, effective Jan. 1st;
RFM certification remains in place**

Wrangell, Alaska (Monday, January 25, 2021) — On January 22, 2021, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification of Pacific cod in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) region was reinstated, effective January 1, 2021, and announced by MRAG Americas, Inc., the independent certification body responsible for conducting the annual audits of the fishery.

From April 5, 2020 through December 31, 2020, the MSC certification for GOA Pacific cod had been suspended due to a decline in the stock. According to MRAG Americas, the suspension was “not due to overfishing or a lack of a responsible management response, rather, the depressed stocks of Pacific cod in the Gulf of Alaska below the B20% limit is climate driven and caused by the Gulf of Alaska marine heat wave.”

From 2017 through 2019, the GOA Pacific cod stock had declined due to the effects of an anomalous warm water event in 2014-2016. This marine heat wave, among other things, reduced food availability for cod and dramatically increased natural mortality. In response, federal and state fishery managers took swift and immediate action to severely restrict commercial fishing efforts — a responsible and precautionary management decision responding to ecosystem uncertainty. In 2018 and 2019, harvests were reduced by 80% to maintain the future viability of the fishery. In 2020, commercial fishing was closed in the federal GOA fishery and the small state fishery was further reduced.

“The decision to lift the suspension comes as a result of an expedited audit that was announced on December 22, 2020. The audit was based on new information on the stock status provided by NOAA Fisheries and decisions by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council,” explains MRAG Americas in its announcement.

“As the Client for the Alaska Pacific cod fishery, AFDF is happy to see the stock of GOA Pacific cod rebounding due to the immediate and responsible actions taken by fishery managers to severely restrict commercial fishing effort. This is a textbook example of how responsible fishery management decisions are made and implemented. We are proud to represent an industry that prioritizes the sustainability of the fishery over short-term gains. These are not easy or painless decisions to make,” stated AFDF Executive Director, Julie Decker.

MRAG Americas continued to explain that MSC approved a variation request to allow the reinstatement to be back-dated to January 1, 2021, because the information was available at that time and the fishery began on that date. ***Back-dating the reinstatement of the certification to January 1, 2021, is important, because it will allow all Pacific cod harvested from Alaska in 2021 to be sold as MSC certified, allowing for clarity in the supply chain and to customers purchasing Pacific cod from Alaska.***

The Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) sustainability certification program is an internationally accredited ecolabel for Alaska fisheries. The RFM certification remained in place throughout 2020 for all Pacific cod harvested from Alaska, due to differences between the MSC and RFM standards. Specifically, the RFM standard does not require an automatic suspension when a fishery drops below B20%, rather, it assesses the management responses as well. The RFM certification of Pacific cod harvested from Alaska is expected to remain in place throughout 2021 after the normal annual audit is completed later this year. RFM chain of custody (CoC) certification audits can be done in conjunction with those for MSC. Interested companies can find more information [here](#).