

Social Responsibility Onboard Commercial Fishing Vessels in Alaska:

Labor and Safety Laws, Practices and Enforcement by Vessel and Target Species
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Demand is increasing quickly for documentation of socially responsible practices on commercial fishing vessels in response to efforts to eradicate the use of slave, forced or child labor. Buyers and the public are now asking U.S. seafood companies for credible and transparent documentation that the seafood purchased was not produced using these forms of labor, with particular concern regarding labor practices onboard commercial fishing vessels, due to their isolation at sea and the violations previously found on foreign vessels. However, using a one-size-fits-all approach to solve this global issue ironically could harm Alaska and other U.S. fishermen, especially the small boat fleet and fishing families.

Alaska is a world leader in environmental sustainability and social responsibility. The culture of the fishing industry values independence, freedom of choice, and fishing families. Fisheries in Alaska operate under a comprehensive suite of federal and state laws and regulations, in conjunction with enforcement, insurance requirements, and common industry practices, which create a fair and safe working environment for commercial fishermen. Transparency, including frequent opportunity for third-eye witness to vessel practices and clarity of jurisdiction in fisheries off Alaska, promotes responsible practices onboard. The combination of government oversight and business incentives to reduce risk ensures an extremely low risk of egregious labor practices (such as slave, forced and child labor) for customers purchasing Alaska seafood throughout the supply chain.

With regards to enforcement, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is the primary enforcement agency for commercial fishing vessel safety and conducts countless vessel inspections. In 2017, over 9,000 commercial fishing vessels were licensed to operate in Alaska. Over 8,500 (or 93%) of these vessels were under 59 feet in length, had crews of 5 people or less, and regularly returned to port in 10 days or less. ***In the years 2014 to 2018, the USCG conducted 2,168 at-sea inspections of commercial fishing vessels in state and federal waters off Alaska for safety and fisheries regulations and documented a 91.9% compliance rate. During this reporting period, the USCG also conducted over 9,000 dockside safety inspections of commercial fishing vessels operating in state and federal waters off Alaska.***

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) and the United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) have taken the initiative to document socially responsible practices onboard Alaska commercial fishing vessels in a series of documents. The table in this document provides generalized information for commercial vessel classes, regulations and laws governing vessels used in commercial fishing, and the common practices employed by the fishing industry to ensure a safe and fair working environment for commercial fishermen in Alaska. This information can be provided to customers as validation that the Alaska commercial fishing fleet represents an extremely low-risk of egregious labor practices, particularly slave, forced or child labor. Complementary documents which provide more detailed references and descriptions of the Alaska fishing fleet can be found at www.afdf.org.



Photo credits: Alaska Seafood, UFA, F/V McCre, Alaskan Leader Seafoods, & Corey Arnold

Common Vessel Classes in Alaska Commercial Fisheries and Information Relevant to Social Responsibility

(Vessel Illustrations Credited to: McDowell Group and Alaska Seafood)



Vessel Class by Length	< 28'	28' – 32'	33' – 58'	59' – 79'	80' – 135'	+ 136'	CP 98' – 380'
Count (% of total)	2962 (32%)	2629 (28.4%)	2978 (32.1%)	210 (2.3%)	326 (3.5%)	84 (0.9%)	72 (0.8%)
Tonnage (est)	< 5 GT	5 - 20 GT	20 - 100 GT	100 - 150 GT	150 - 200 GT	200 – 2000 GT	200 – 5000 GT
People Onboard	< 5	≤ 5	≤ 5	< 10	< 10	< 10	15 – 140
Voyage Length	< 24 hours	< 3 days	< 10 days	< 14 days	< 14 days	< 14 days	< 30 days
Area of Operation	State Waters	State Waters	State and Federal Waters	State and Federal Waters	State and Federal Waters	State and Federal Waters	State and Federal Waters
Common Gear Types	J, LL, SN, P	J, PS, LL, DN, TRO, P	PS, DN, TRA, TRO, P, TE, LL	TRA, LL, TE, P	TRA, LL, TE, P	TRA, P	LL, TRA, P
Species Targeted	Sa, GF, SF, H, Ha	H, Sa, SF, GF, Ha	H, Sa, SF, GF, Ha	SF, GF, Ha	SF, GF, Ha	GF, SF	GF, SF
Ownership	F/I	F/I, CO	F/I, CO	F/I, CO	F/I, CO	F/I, CO	CO
Forced Labor	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Child Labor	PC, PE	PC, PE	PC, PE	PC, PE	PC, PE	N	N
Discrimination	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Payment Agreement	FI, CS	FI, CS	FI, CS	FI, CS	CS	CS	CS, Wages
Contract Agreement	*Written	*Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written
Insurance – P & I	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emergency Equipment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
First Aid/CPR Training	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bunkroom	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Living Space	N	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Vessel License	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
USCG COC	N	N	S	Y	Y	Y	Y
Survival Crafts	N	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
USCG Safety Inspections	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
AK Crew License	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observer Onboard	N	N	S	S	S	Y	Y
Vessel Insurance	S	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

CO: Company-Owned
 CS: Crew Share
 CP: Catcher-Processor
 DN: Drift Net
 FI: Family Income
 F/I: Family/Individual
 FW: Federal Waters

GF: Groundfish
 GT: Gross Tons
 Ha: Halibut
 J: Jig
 LL: Longline
 H: Herring
 N: No

P: Pot
 P & I: Protection & Indemnity
 PC: Parental Consent
 PE: Parental Exemption
 PS: Purse Seine
 S: Sometimes
 Sa: Salmon

SF: Shellfish
 SN: Setnet
 SW: State Waters
 TE: Tender
 TRA: Trawl
 TRO: Troll
 Y: Yes

The information presented in the above table is generalized by vessel class; exceptions may exist.

Parental Consent (PC): Minors ages 16 and 17 may be employed on commercial fishing vessels if parental consent and a work permit is provided and approved by the AK Department of Labor. The employment of minors is prohibited when jobs include hazardous duties.

Parental Exemption (PE): Granted to parents of minor children working under direct supervision of the parent if he/she is the vessel owner/operator.

Contract Agreement: Written crew and/or employment contracts required for all vessels of 20 GT or more (roughly 40% of CFEC permitted vessels are > 20 GT).

*Commercial fishing vessels under 20 GT are not required by law to have written crew contracts, however, it is encouraged by insurance companies & industry insurance pools. If no written contracts exist, verbal contracts are the industry norm.

Insurance – P & I: Compensates for medical care, legal costs, and lost wages for crewmembers who were injured or fell ill while at sea.

Voyage Length: Duration between deliveries at-sea or in port.

Emergency Equipment: Personal floatation devices and/or survival suits.

AK Crew License: State of Alaska requires all crewmembers of any age to be licensed.

Sources: ADF&G, OSHA, USCG, NOAA, NPFMC, McDowell Group, NIOSH, The Jones Act, American Fisheries Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, Alaska State Statute, Alaska Administrative Code, The Code of Federal Regulations, United States Code, Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, Industry Representatives, National Labor Relations Act, Fair Labor Standards Act, Victims of Human Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, Immigration and Nationality Act, Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act, Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), ILO C-188, Occupational Safety and Health Act, Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010, 2015 & 2017, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2012.