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COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1151/2012
on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs

"LOUGH NEAGH POLLAN"

PDO (X) PGI ( )

1. RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT IN THE MEMBER STATE: UNITED KINGDOM

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2. GROUP

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Composition: Producers/processors

3 TYPE OF PRODUCT

Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived therefrom

4 SPECIFICATION

(summary of requirements under Article 7 of Regulation (EC) No 1151/2012)

4.1 Name:

Lough Neagh Pollan

4.2 Description:

Lough Neagh Pollan is the name given to the lacustrine fish of the species *Coregonus pollan* which are harvested as a wild fish. Lough Neagh Pollan can only be harvested in the defined geographical area of Lough Neagh.

Pollan are the only European vertebrate found uniquely in Ireland, and Lough Neagh Pollan the only commercially harvested stock of the fish in Europe. As such the eating quality and experience associated with Lough Neagh Pollan are directly derived from their sole existence within the defined geographical area. In appearance, the Lough Neagh Pollan are bright silver in colour, with dark dorsal colouration and pale fins. They are physically distinguished from other Coregonids in the British Isles by having:

- a lower jaw that does not project
- 41 - 48 gill rakers
- 74 - 92 lateral line scales.

Lough Neagh Pollan are fast growing, averaging 140mm at the end of their first year, 170mm at the end of the second year and 200mm by year three. Compared to other Irish fish populations they are short lived, mostly attaining a 3 – 4 year lifespan. Lough Neagh Pollan are early maturing (2yrs, 164 -185mm), and spawn in December in shallow areas of Lough Neagh on gravel or rock sub-strata.

The relevant fisheries legislation sets the minimum landing size for Lough Neagh Pollan as 205mm in length. Fish of this size typically range in age from 3-4 years and 76 - 210g in weight.

Lough Neagh Pollan are sold whole gutted or filleted, which are either fresh or frozen. Lough Neagh Pollan have a uniquely fresh, mossy, earthy aroma with soft, white flesh. They are revered for their white, flaky flesh, which has a delicate flavour and aroma when cooked.

4.3 Geographical area:

The geographical area consists of Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland (54.6302, 6.4380 Lat. Long.) and includes the on-shore area incorporated within a 2 mile perimeter of the lough's shoreline within which all processing of Pollan occurs. .

The Lough is situated in the centre of Northern Ireland, and is bordered by 5 of the 6 counties in the province. With an area of 151 square miles (392km^2) and an average depth of 8.9m, it is the largest lake in the British Isles and the fifth largest lake in Europe. It is fed from 8 afferent rivers and drains to the sea via the Lower River Bann at its northern end.

Lough Neagh Pollan are a lake-only species and are not found in the surrounding tributaries of Lough Neagh.


Coleraine
Sperrins
Lower River Bann
River Maine
Antrim Plateau
Ballymena
Antrim
Cookstown
Lough Neagh
Dungannon
River Blackwater
Portadown
Craigavon
Armagh
Banbridge
Upper River Bann
Monaghan
Newry
Mountains of Mourne
Dundalk
Carlingford Lough
Dundalk Bay
River Fane
Ardee



4.4 Proof of origin:

There is specific legislation on how Lough Neagh Pollan can be harvested. This restricts harvesting to the defined geographical area of Lough Neagh using the traditional draft netting and gill netting methods described below. To guarantee quality and traceability, processing, which involves cleaning and temperature control, is carried out within 2 miles of the perimeter of the Lough's shoreline.

Legislative control for the harvest of Lough Neagh Pollan defines the permitted size of Lough Neagh Pollan landed (minimum 205mm) and determines the closed season as being 31st October to 31st January.

Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society Ltd owns the rights to Pollan fishing on Lough Neagh, issue permits for their capture and advocates their harvest in accordance with the legislative controls. Lough Neagh Pollan are sold by fishermen to the fishery owner, Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society Ltd. (LNFCS)

or their authorised agents, all of whom are registered dealers. The dealers are required to record the weight of fish landed, by whom it was landed and details of the onward sale of processed Pollan. This information is held within the dealers register, is submitted to the Inland Fisheries Branch of the relevant Government Department and copied to the fishery owner, LNFCS by the authorised agent.

4.5 Method of production:

Lough Neagh Pollan are captured using traditional draft netting and gill netting (known locally as Trammel netting). This is facilitated by the Lough's shallow depth and the unusually level nature of the topography of the lough bed which are specific features of this geographical area. Boat size on Lough Neagh is typically 8.6m long and 2.7m wide. Fishing boats are not generally built to a standard prepared plan, but instead by craftsmen following their local traditions, with boat design influenced by the heritage of that community and the nature of the environment in which they will operate. The type of boat used by fishermen is often influenced by the local boat builder's preference for wood or fibre glass. The Lough Neagh fishing boats retain many traditional features despite their larger size, more powerful engines and the availability of new materials. Clinker construction, bolster, outrigger and tholepin are incorporated in the latest fibre glass designs.

Draft net:

Relevant provisions with regard to draft net specification are set out *in national* regulations and provide details of mesh size and overall net dimensions including:-

- Tail mesh not less than 6mm knot to knot
- Draft net length not greater than 120m
- Draft net mesh in wings not less than 21mm knot to knot

Draft netting is an active method with contemporary nets ranging from 80 to 100 yards (73.2 to 91.4m) in length with a depth of 14 to 20 yards (12.8 to 18.3m). Fishermen often rely on experience and their in-depth knowledge of the Lough to locate the best catches under variable environmental and weather conditions. Using a draft net, Lough Neagh Pollan are typically caught in water depths of 20 – 30 feet (6.1 to 9.1m).

When setting the net a marker float, net stake and anchor are first lowered with about 80 yards (73.2m) of “head rope” attached. The net is first set in a straight line. It is attached to 2 wooden stakes which keep it open when pulled in a semi-circular sweep by the boat. To prevent tearing the net, a sandy bottom is always preferred for this operation. The boat returns to the marker and the stake with the head rope attached is released. The net is hauled in by 2 fishermen standing in the stern who pull in both the head and the stern ropes. Fish within the area of the net are captured in a cod end. Hydraulic pot haulers are now commonly used to retrieve the ropes attached to the nets, but the net itself must be hauled in by hand, not towed by the boat. Trawling for Lough Neagh Pollan is banned to protect the bed of the Lough.

Gill net:

Gill netting is a passive method with the net deployed and retrieved by a standard Lough Neagh fishing boat. Gill netting is the most common pollan fishing method used on the lough. Gill nets require a mesh size of 27mm or more (knot to knot) or 108mm to be measured all round each mesh. The top line is fitted with cork floats whilst the bottom of the net is fitted with a leaded line. Each net is typically up to 50 yards (45.7m) long and ranging in depth from 1 to 4 yards (0.9 to 3.7m). Generally, up to 10 nets are tied together as a ‘string of nets’ and fished over a muddy bottom at a depth of 25 – 40 feet (7.6 to 12.2m).

Gill nets are deployed and left to fish for an appropriate period, before they are retrieved and any captured fish removed. The nets are normally retrieved daily if water temperature is >10^{o}C but under colder conditions, nets can be left for up to 2 days.

Lough Neagh Pollan can only be caught in the defined geographical area. To guarantee quality, the preliminary processing, which involves a range of measures including cleaning and temperature control are completed within the defined geographical area. Lough Neagh Pollan is processed in two ways depending on customer requirements; whole gutted or filleted.

Whole gutted Lough Neagh Pollan

- Processing of whole gutted Lough Neagh Pollan involves descaling, evisceration and cleaning.

- Once processing has been completed, chilled product must be reduced to < 2^{o}C and frozen product must be reduced to -18^{o}C.

Filleted Lough Neagh Pollan

- There is no set procedure, filleting can be completed by hand or in larger operations, using industrial equipment. The steps commonly used are;
    - descaling
    - fin removal
    - head removal or incision under gill providing access to the fillet
    - top fillet removal
    - bottom fillet removal
    - removal of lateral pin bones from both fillets
    - cleaning
    - chilling (ice) or freezing (blast freezing)
    - packing

- Once processing has been completed, chilled product must be reduced to < 2^{o}C and frozen product must be reduced to -18^{o}C.

4.6 Link:

Pollan are the only European vertebrate found uniquely in Ireland, where their entire distribution is limited to the following 5 loughs:

- Lough Allen
- Lough Ree
- Lough Derg
- Lough Erne (Lower)
- Lough Neagh

However, only Lough Neagh contains sufficient stock to support a commercial fishery, as the other loughs contain only small residual populations.

Lough Neagh, with an area of 151 square miles (392km^2), and an average depth of 8.9m is the largest lake in the British Isles and the fifth largest lake in Europe. It is

fed from 8 afferent rivers and drains to the sea via the Lower River Bann at its northern end. Lough Neagh Pollan are a lake-only species and are not found in the surrounding tributaries.

The characteristics of the Lough Neagh Pollan are linked to the environment where it grows, which in turn have been instrumental in developing the traditional methods used in its capture. The characteristics of the Lough Neagh Pollan are a product of genetic divergence from its closest living relative, the Arctic omul, (circa 200,000 years ago) and its survival and subsequent confinement in a restricted geographical area. Pollan colonised Lough Neagh after the last ice age, circa 12,000 years ago. As the sea temperature and salinity increased, the Pollan lost its migratory behaviour and became restricted to the freshwater habitat of Lough Neagh, adapting to a temperate climate.

The large number of rivers flowing into Lough Neagh result in high sediment deposits. These sediments are very dark and are composed of silts and clays, organic matter and diatom frustules. The silts and clays are primarily derived from river borne suspended material whilst the organic matter originates partly from catchment sources and partly from material produced within Lough Neagh.

The nature of the sediment makes it a suitable habitat for the multitude of invertebrate life. Lough Neagh Pollan feed on plankton, insect larva (mainly chironomids) and the glacial relict crustaceans *Mysis salemaai*. These constitute a major proportion of the diet of Lough Neagh Pollan. The ready availability of this invertebrate based diet, together with the hypereutrophic status and well-mixed nature of the lough, contributes to the Lough Neagh Pollan's characteristically fast growth rate.

Lough Neagh is rich in nutrients (hypereutrophic) and is continually aerated by circulating winds, which ensures that the enriched nature of the lough does not precipitate a dramatic loss of oxygen in the warmer months.

The combination of feedstuffs and retained oxygen levels means that Lough Neagh sustains an enhanced invertebrate population, which in turn supports the production of a large and varied fish biomass. Lough Neagh Pollan are the only commercially harvested stock of the species in Europe. As such the eating quality and experience

associated with Lough Neagh Pollan are directly derived from their sole existence within the defined geographical area.

Before 1900, the harvesting of Lough Neagh Pollan dominated fishing activities on the lough. It is still considered an economically important species and depending on the time of year Lough Neagh Pollan makes up a significant proportion of catches. Over the last 15 years between 50 and 200 tonnes have been harvested annually from Lough Neagh. Lough Neagh Pollan exhibit a wide distribution throughout the lough, but have preferred habitats, which are closely linked to life history stage, topography, substrate, water depth and season. Unlike all other members of the cisco whitefish family, which are found in Arctic climes, Pollan have evolved to exist in temperate waters.

Heritage, tradition and reputation

The Lough Neagh Pollan can claim to have been a key feature within the food heritage and traditions of this region and its people for hundreds of years, yet is still revered for its unique qualities in the 21st Century.

Legend has it that the warrior giant Finn McCool created Lough Neagh by scooping up a handful of earth and flinging it at a rival Scottish giant. The earth landed in the sea, creating the Isle of Man and the resulting hole filled up with water and became the lough. However, in 1188 A.D. the historian *Giraldus Cambrensis* 'confirmed' that Lough Neagh emanated from a magical spring.

Archaeologists believe that fishing has taken place on Lough Neagh since the Bronze Age, with skeletal remains uncovered when excavating settlements dating back 3 - 4,000 years. In 590 A.D. St Colman founded a monastery at Ardboe on the western shores of Lough Neagh and tradition has it that he fished for eels and pollan from there. Successive generations of fishermen in this area have attributed their fishing skills to the influence of St Colman. The ownership of the various rights on Lough Neagh and the River Bann derive from the mid 1600's, when King Charles I granted the bed, soil and fishing rights to the Earl of Donegal.

There are a number of superstitions held by the fishermen of Lough Neagh. It is believed unlucky to turn back once you have gone out onto the lough, even if you have forgotten equipment. Many fishermen, particularly on the western shore would

have tied a piece of flannel on the nets to ward off curses whilst donkey's manure in the tail of the net is considered lucky. Older fishermen also believed it was unlucky to have salt in the boat, or to boil an egg in the boat. Smoking and or whistling on board were also frowned upon, as it was believed that smoking scared away the fish and whistling would bring on a storm. Although women helped with much of the preparation for fishing, having women in the boat was considered bad luck. The sight of a red-haired woman was considered very bad luck, especially on New Year's Day. If a fisherman met a red-haired woman on the road on the way to fishing, he would turn on the road and take 3 steps with her to counter the bad luck.

Between 1712 and 1713 Sir Francis Nevill a prominent Government surveyor and engineer (formerly a Captain in the British Army) wrote extensively to St. George Ashe, Bishop of Clogher, then based in London and a Member of the Royal Society. The letters contain an intriguing mix of observation of natural phenomena, folklore and archaeological discoveries, and some were printed in the Society's Transactions. An excerpt from a letter of Sir Francis Nevill to George Ashe about Lough Neagh – 12 February 1712:

'Now as to the Lake ….. It does not abound with many sorts of Fish, but those that are very good, such as Salmon, Trout, Pike, Breame, Roch, Eels and Pollans, with which last it does abound: The English call then fresh Water Herrings, for want of another Name; for Pollan is an Irish Name ….'

Discussion of a proposed Pollan Fishing Bill at Westminster – 1881

15 August 1881 – Pollan Fishing (Ireland) Bill

The Solicitor General for Ireland (Mr WM Johnston) – *'I hope the house would allow the Bill to be read a second time. Pollan was a freshwater herring, peculiar to Lough Neagh, and in season up to the 1st November, Between 300 and 400 persons lived mainly by this fishing, and as the salmon and trout season closed much earlier the Inspectors of Fisheries, up to last year, made separate orders for the close season for salmon and trout and for the close season for pollan; but it had now been found that under the existing law such separate orders could not lawfully be made, and that there could only be the same close season for salmon and trout and for pollan. The consequence of this was that although pollan were in season they could not be captured after the close season for salmon had commenced. This was a serious*

hardship to an industrious class of fishermen, which it was the object of the present Bill to remedy, and to enable pollan to be captured during the salmon close time, and when pollan was in season.'

Endorsements:

"When I see them on a menu my heart skips, but it's a rare thing. Speak to anyone who's tried pollan and they get nostalgic and a bit choked up! I remember shopping in Cookstown with my Granny Kathleen, where, on market day, she would buy pollan from the fisherman selling them from buckets on the street. She was a nurse in Coalisland so invariably knew the sellers well, and always got a bit extra free! She fried the fish and we guzzled them with bread and butter. To this day it's one of the simplest and most evocative food memories I have. They're a fresh water fish, but look like sea herring. When you fillet them you don't get the ozoney smell you do from sea fish, but instead a fresh, mossy, earthy aroma." - Paula McIntyre (Northern Irish Chef and Food Writer)

"James Street South love to use Lough Neagh Pollan, as we endeavour to use locally sourced produce when available. Lough Neagh Pollan has a great texture for serving as a cured fish or marinated with flavours such as rosewater, it allows itself to shine when treated delicately. To be able to use such unique ingredients and offer them to our diners is great for us as a restaurant" - David Gillmore (Head Chef, James Street South Restaurant, Belfast)

4.7 Inspection body:

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The inspection body conforms to the principles of EN 45011 standard.

4.8 Labelling: