

ADVISORY PANEL REPORT
TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
CONCERNING TANNER CRAB IN THE EASTERN BERING SEA

By Nick Szabo and Chuck Jensen
January 28, 1977

SZABO: The Advisory Panel, meeting as a whole, strongly felt that action by the Council at its last meeting, December 2-5, 1976, did not carry out the spirit and intent of the 200-mile act (P. L. 94-265) to give preferential rights to U. S. fishermen. To be consistent with the spirit and intent of the act and to minimize gear conflicts between foreign and domestic fishermen, the Advisory Panel recommends that:

- 1) No foreign harvest of tanner crab be allowed south of 58° north latitude and east of 173° west longitude;
- 2) Any foreign fishery of C. Bairdi tanner crab be restricted to male crab greater than 140 mm. carapace width.

The Advisory Panel developed these recommendations after lengthy consideration of the following information. The best scientific information available indicates a total allowable catch (TAC) in the eastern Bering Sea of 108 million pounds of C. Bairdi tanner crab greater than 140 mm. carapace width. However, the Council has not addressed adjusting the 108 million pound figure to an optimum yield (OY) value that would take into consideration the economic efficiency of the U. S. crab fleet. Available evidence points to an OY of 65 million pounds of tanner crab, an OY which would be totally harvestable by the U. S. crab fleet.

C. Bairdi tanner crab are dispersed over a broad geographic area in the eastern Bering Sea. Abundance levels throughout much of this area are substantially below that which can be profitably harvested. An analysis of the eastern Bering Sea shows that areas of high concentration represent only a small portion of the total area occupied by the tanner crab species. It can be calculated that 60% of the population of male tanner crab greater than 140 mm. is found in these areas of high concentration. Since only 60% of the C. Bairdi population is economically available to the fishery, this results in an OY of 65 million pounds.

The areas of high concentration of tanner crab correspond almost exactly to areas of current U. S. fishing activity. In other words, the areas currently utilized by the U. S. fleet are the only areas of high concentration of C. Bairdi tanner crab. There is no question that the U. S. fleet has both the desire and the capability to harvest 65 million pounds of tanner crab. In 1976 the crab fleet

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harvested 63 million pounds of king crab in approximately two months. In 1976 approximately 20 vessels harvested 20 million pounds of tanner crab in the Bering Sea during a three-month period. With the possibility in 1977 of twice the number of vessels participating in the fishery and a minimal ice pack doubling available fishing time, the catch could increase fourfold. The only question that remains is whether the market structure exists to absorb this increased amount of tanner crab.

JENSEN: We at Pacific Pearl Seafoods, Inc., feel that the taking of 50-55 million pounds of C. Bairdi tanner crab in the Bering Sea would not cause serious marketing problems for the U. S. industry. Assuming a 20% recovery, that is only about 3/4 of one ounce per person in the United States. Even if it were a problem, the foreign markets have not been fully developed and the surplus, if any, could be marketed there.

We see, therefore, no reason why the American fishing industry should not be allowed to take the entire quota of C. Bairdi crab in the Bering Sea.

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