

Alaska Department of Fish and Game: Fishery Report, December Council Meeting

Westward Tanner Crab

In a November 3rd news release, the Department of Fish and Game released the guideline harvest levels for the 1989/1990 season. The following table outlines the projected harvest levels:

1989/1990 Tanner Crab Season and Guidelines

<u>District</u>	<u>Season Opening</u>	<u>Midpoint Guidelines Harvest Level Million Pounds</u>
Kodiak	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	4.7
Chignik	Closed	
South Peninsula	Closed	
Eastern Aleutian	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	None
Western Aleutian	12:00 Noon, Nov. 1	None
Bering Sea (C. bairdi)	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	29.5
Bering Sea (C. opilio)	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	139.8

The industry was cautioned that for the Bering Sea C. bairdi fishery that the large guideline harvest level of 29.5 million pounds may be modified based on the actual abundance encountered during the fishery. Catch per unit effort levels inseason will be compared to that of previous years when stock levels were similar to the 1989/1990 estimate to determine if adjustments to the guideline harvest level will be required.

Additional details on other C. bairdi fisheries and the Bering Sea C. opilio fishery are contained in the enclosed news release.

Bering Sea Red Crab

The Bering Sea red crab fishery was closed at 12:00 Noon October 6 after twelve days of fishing. The initial midpoint guideline harvest level target of 16.5 million pounds was revised downward to the low end of guideline harvest range (11.2 million pounds) inseason after a low catch per unit of effort indicated that the number of legal crab present was below projected levels. The final harvest for the season was 10.3 million pounds.

The monitoring of the 1989 fishery was aided by continued cooperation from fishermen operating catcher vessels who volunteered to provide coded catch information via a daily radio call in program. This information, combined with the information provided by the observers on catcher processor vessels, was used to manage the fishery.

### Winter Troll Fishery

The winter troll fishery opened on October 1 and will continue until April 15th. The harvest, through mid-November, is approximately 12,000 chinook salmon. Harvest of chinook salmon during the winter season normally produces 60% of the winter catch by December 31. We anticipate that the 1989-90 winter harvest will be average to below average if catch trends are consistent with previous years. A combination of poor weather conditions in October, low starting price, and lack of abundance in the Sitka Sound area controlled fishing effort during the first half of the winter season. Price paid to fisherman have risen in past weeks, but poor weather conditions persist and catch rates remain spotty.

# COMMERCIAL FISHERIES



## NEWS RELEASE



ALASKA DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH & GAME

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: November 3, 1989

### ATTENTION WESTWARD TANNER CRAB FISHERMEN

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have completed their trawl surveys of Westward Tanner crab stocks. Based on these surveys, the Department has projected a forecast of anticipated harvest from various areas within the Region. These forecasts, as determined from preseason surveys, must be viewed as preliminary midpoint guideline harvest. Final harvest levels for each area may vary greatly from preseason midpoint guideline harvest levels and can only be determined with additional information provided from assessment of inseason fishery performance. Such inseason assessment will determine the actual levels of harvest and closure dates.

The following preseason midpoint guideline harvest provide a working target harvest level for each area and species:

### 1989/1990 Tanner Crab Seasons and Guidelines

<u>District</u>	<u>Season Opening</u>	<u>Midpoint Guideline Harvest Level Million Pounds</u>
Kodiak	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	4.7
Chignik	Closed	
South Peninsula	Closed	
Eastern Aleutian	12:00 Noon, Jan. 15	None
Western Aleutian	12:00 Noon, Nov. 1	None
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The 1989/1990 legal populations for Kodiak districts were estimated to be 1.03 million animals for the Northwest, .90 million for the Eastside, .53 million for the Southeast, .59 million for the News

Southwest, .58 million for the Westside and 1.15 million for the North Mainland district. Island-wide populations were estimated to be 4.78 million animals.

Abundance (in numbers) was converted to weight (average wt = 2.5 lbs/crab) and a 40 percent exploitation rate was applied to estimate midpoint guideline harvest levels by district as follows:

<u>District</u>	<u>Millions of Pounds</u>
Northeast	1.0
East side	.9
Southeast	.5
Southwest	.6
West side	.6
North Mainland	<u>1.1</u>
Total	4.7

The Chignik and South Peninsula districts will not be open due to extremely low estimates of legal crab abundance. While some limited harvest could be justified, there is too much risk due to the unrestricted level of effort which could participate in a fishery. The season would be unmanageably short and no inseason assessment of the fishery could occur. Therefore neither of these fisheries will open.

The Eastern and Western Aleutians districts have not been surveyed; therefore, no midpoint guideline harvests were set. Last season's harvests were 320,000 and 150,000 pounds, respectively.

The Bering Sea survey indicated a total legal population of bairdi Tanner crab of 33.6 million animals. Converting this number to weight (2.2 lbs per crab), and applying an exploitation rate of 40%, provides a midpoint guideline harvest estimate of 29.5 million pounds. Initially, the 29.5 million pound midpoint guideline harvest will be the target for the fishery. The estimate provided is derived from the point estimate of the weight of legal crab from the Bering Sea Trawl survey as provided to the Department of Fish and Game by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Due to concerns that the survey estimates may be high, managers will closely monitor the inseason performance of the fishing fleet in the area and adjust the harvest level accordingly. Trends in season catch per unit effort (CPUE) information for the 1989/1990 fishery and comparisons to CPUE data from previous seasons, when the bairdi stock was similar to the 1989/1990 estimate, will be used to determine if adjustments in midpoint guideline harvest will be necessary.

Industry is cautioned when using this forecast for planning because of the uncertainties in the survey data. Additionally if significant bycatches of soft shelled crab are experienced in this fishery, closures may be implemented to minimize crab mortalities.

The Bering Sea C. opilio stocks continue to be at a high level. The legal male population larger than 4 inches in shell width has been the target of industry, therefore a 58 percent exploitation rate is applied. The population of male crab greater than 4 inches in shell width is estimated to be 241 million pounds using an average weight estimate of 1.29 lbs. The actual midpoint guideline harvest level is 139.8 million pounds. This projection is further divided into 87.8 million pounds for the Eastern subdistrict and 52 million pounds for the Western subdistrict. These projections do not consider sorting of crab by the industry's for particular marketing characteristics. "Old shell" and "skip molt" crabs have been sorted from the catch for the past few years to meet industry standards. The percentage of "old shell" and "skip molt" crab in the Eastern subdistrict has increased from 9 percent to 20 percent over the past year. The Western subdistrict appears to have a large increase of these "dark shell" crab, with 38 percent of the target size crab being "old shell" and "skip molts" this year as compared to 21 percent last year. How these increases of "dark shell" will effect the harvest by the fleet is unknown at this time.