

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME****REPORT TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL****September 28, 1994**

Fisheries managed under delegated authority of the State of Alaska since the last council meeting include crab, salmon and demersal rockfish.

ADF&G staff will hold a meeting with the crab industry in Anchorage, October 13, 1994, at the Westcoast International Inn, at 9:00 a.m. The meeting is open to all interested individuals, and the public is urged to attend. An agenda is available upon request.

**BERING SEA KING AND TANNER CRAB FISHERIES:**

Adak Brown king crab: The 1993/94 season ended by regulation August 15, with a harvest of 4.6 million pounds taken by 21 vessels. The 1994/95 king crab season is scheduled to open November 1, 1995.

Norton Sound king crab: The 1994 season opened by regulation as a super-exclusive king crab registration area on July 1. A total of 34 vessels and 52 individual permits landed 328,000 pounds during the 31 day season. Approximately 36%, 118,000 pounds, were processed in Nome by two shore based processors. The remaining 110,000 pounds were either flown to Anchorage to be processed, or sold by local fishermen acting as catcher sellers.

Eighteen vessels from the Norton Sound area, 9 from the Yukon Delta, 3 Alaskan -non resident, and 4 non-Alaskan vessels participated in the fishery.

During the 1994 fishery, an unusual high incidence of sublegal crab

were noted during sampling. ADF&G biologist are presently reviewing this information. If further study is necessary, additional funding will need to be pursued.

Bristol Bay red king crab: Population abundance for the Bristol Bay red king crab has been estimated by the National Marine Fisheries Service using data from the 1994 trawl survey. Estimated numbers of mature males and females and legal-sized males show a clear declining trend in the last six year's data.

The 1994 abundance estimate is the lowest in the history of the NMFS survey, and indicates little prospect for an increased recruitment of mature males or females in the near future. In fact, stock viability has reached a level where the female threshold was not reached this year.

In consultation with NMFS staff and Crab Plan Team members, the department concluded that the estimates for the number of mature females falls below the threshold of 8.4 million crabs. Due to the poor conditions of this stock, lack of recruitment and failure to meet the female threshold value, the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery will not be opened to commercial fishing in 1994.

St. Matthew blue and Pribilof Island red king crab: Both seasons opened on September 15. A preseason GHU of 3.0 million pounds was established for the St. Matthew fishery, and 2.0 million pounds for the Pribilof fishery. The department decided not to manage either of these fisheries inseason, and based the September 22 closure of the St. Matthew season and September 21 for the Pribilof area on last years catch levels. Vessel effort in 1994 season for the two fisheries was similar to the 93 season; 89 vs 92 in St. Matthew, and 108 vs 115 in the Pribilof fishery. Season totals are not available at this time.

Bering Sea Tanner Crab: The 1994/95 *C. bairdi* Tanner crab fishery is scheduled to open by regulation on November 1, 1994, concurrent to the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery. Suggestions by the a portion of the industry to delay the season was denied by the commissioner on September 20. ADF&G regulations state that if the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery does not open, the *C. bairdi* Tanner crab fishery will open November 1, but only in the area between 163° and 173° W. longitude, with a GHU of 7.5 million pounds. The legal male abundance for the entire Bering Sea decreased 25% from last year's estimate. The 1994/95 fishery produced 16.9 million pounds.

The 1994/95 *C. opilio* is scheduled to open by regulation January 15, 1995, with a GHU based on 4" or larger crab of 55.7 million pounds; 25.0 from the Eastern subdistrict and 30.7 million pounds from the Western subdistrict. This is a 47% decrease from the 1993 GHU. Because the 1993 fishery performed better than the survey indicated, 105.8 million pounds, the department allowed the harvest to continue to 150 million pounds.

SALMON TROLL FISHERY: The total 1993/94 Chinook salmon catch was 259,000 fish, including 40,500 sport fish take. The summer troll

fishery accounted for 118,000 fish, the winter fishery 56,000 fish, for a total of 184,000 troll caught Chinook, and the net fisheries accounted for 34,000 fish. Alaska Chinook hatchery fish totaled 28,000 for the season.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA DEMERSAL SHELF ROCKFISH FISHERY: The directed DSR fishery will open October 1, 1994. By regulation, 30% of the annual quota is reserved for the fall season, but the actual amount available to the directed fishery will depend on how much of the TAC is left after the halibut opening. Bycatch monitoring and assessment was expected to improve this year with the advent of new regulations. These regulations were not easy to implement and will require further work to meet our objective.

The Chatham Strait sablefish fishery will be open from noon September 22 through noon October 22, 1994. Each permit holder will be limited to 24,500 pounds dressed weight, or 39,000 pounds round weight during this period. A pre-registration signed by the vessel owner and a department representative is required.

The lingcod fishery is progressing well under the management plan adopted in 1994. There have been no inseason closures and quota is available in all areas for the fall fishing period that begins October 1. It is anticipated that the fishery will remain open through the remainder of the year, however, regulations specify that the Waters of Alaska (within three miles) close to all lingcod fishing on November 30 to protect the stocks during the reproductive period.

# COMMERCIAL FISHERIES



## NEWS RELEASE

ALASKA DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH & GAME



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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: September 20, 1994

### ATTENTION BERING SEA CRAB INDUSTRY

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has received requests from portions of the Bering Sea crab industry to consider delaying the *Chionoecetes bairdi* fishery until January 15th to coincide with the *C. opilio* opening. The department has considered extensive written and oral comments by processors and fishermen regarding proposed season opening date changes, as well as current Alaska Board of Fisheries regulations in assessing these requests. The department has concluded that the 1994/95 *C. bairdi* season will open as scheduled on November 1, 1994. A discussion of pertinent factors follows.

The Alaska Board of Fisheries recently addressed this issue when it adopted regulations at the March 1993 meeting establishing the *C. bairdi* season opening date on November 1 in the event the Bristol Bay red king crab season did not open. Industry commented on these actions at the time this regulation was adopted. Although the guideline harvest levels for *C. bairdi* and *C. opilio* were not known, the Board was aware that the 1994 harvest levels would more than likely be lower than 1993. The department has not been presented with significant different biological information than what was available to the Board when it developed this opening date regulation.

Some industry members expressed concerns about possible high bycatches of female red king crabs during the November 1 season. In general, handling mortalities remains a concern with the department. However, in this particular case, survey and fishery data indicates handling of bycatch will not be high. National Marine Fisheries data show that the low numbers of female red king crabs are west of 163° W. longitude. Analysis of red king crab bycatch in the target Tanner crab fishery shows that very few crabs will be handled in either a November 1 or January 15 fishery. Additionally, the 3" tunnel eye regulation for the Tanner crab fishery effectively

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restricts large female red king crabs from entering pots. The department concludes that bycatch of female red king crabs is not a conservation issue within the November 1 Tanner crab fishery.

Bycatch of undersized, non-target *C. bairdi* crabs has long been a conservation concern of the department in previous concurrent *C. bairdi* and *C. opilio* seasons. Overfishing of small *C. bairdi* crabs poses a conservation concern while fishing for the more abundant *C. opilio*. Conversely, bycatch of *C. opilio* crabs during the *C. bairdi* fishery is also a concern of the department due to the large potential for handling-induced mortalities. With the current separation of the *C. bairdi* and *C. opilio* seasons, known problems associated with sorting mixed catches are minimized as the fleet generally targets areas where *C. bairdi* and *C. opilio* do not overlap. Results from the 1994 NMFS trawl survey indicate that though these species overlap, the overwhelming majority of each population is geographically distinct.