

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and AP Members
FROM: Chris Oliver *DOE*
Executive Director
DATE: January 26, 2012
SUBJECT: BSAI crab issues

ESTIMATED TIME
8 HOURS
ALL C-3 ITEMS

ACTION REQUIRED

- (a) Update on Pribilof Islands blue king crab rebuilding plan; action as necessary

BACKGROUND

On September 24, 2009, NMFS notified the Council that the Pribilof Islands blue king crab (PIBKC) rebuilding plan has not achieved adequate progress to rebuild the stock by 2014 and that this stock remains overfished. To comply with section 304(e)(7) of the MSA, the Council has two years from this notification to prepare and implement an amended PIBKC rebuilding plan.

The Council has reviewed iterations of this rebuilding plan analysis at multiple meetings, most recently at final action in October 2011, when the Council changed the range of rebuilding plan alternatives to include an option to Alternative 2, and a new Preliminary Preferred Alternative that involves a year-round closure to the Pacific cod pot fishing in the Pribilof Island Habitat Conservation Zone and a prohibited species catch (PSC) limit that triggers a larger area closure to additional fisheries. At the December 2011 meeting, the Council was informed of some analytical changes to the qualified fisheries for the analysis as well as received in public comments some requests to consider additional elements in the analysis and suite of alternatives. The current suite of alternatives including changes indicated to the qualifying fisheries is attached as Item C-3(a)(1).

As a result, the Council rescheduled final action on this document and requested that staff provide an update at this meeting on many of the elements discussed for inclusion in the analysis. The Council requested additional information on the following: the survey distribution of PIBKC in conjunction with observed bycatch; the boundaries of the State PIBKC registration district including rationale for the boundaries as well as the process by which registration areas can be modified, information on how a cap in numbers of crab vs. weight of crab is calculated; draft results of seasonal apportionment strategy; rollover mechanics of unused PIBKC PSC, increased observer coverage, whole haul sampling, seasonal apportionment of PIBKC PSC, and incorporation of discard mortality rates in inseason management; and any additional issues regarding qualified fisheries. Several discussion papers have been prepared by staff to address these issues.

Overfishing limit for PIBKC stock: There are multiple issues related to this analysis involved in the overfishing limit (OFL) for the PIBKC stock both in relation to setting this value and the implications of changes to that in the rebuilding. These involve how the current OFL is determined based upon stock status, the area over which the OFL is currently applied, the area over which it may be applied in the

future, the mechanisms by which this stock area may be modified, and the catch accounting issues associated with bycatch accrual over different spatial areas. A discussion paper addressing these issues is attached as in Item C-3(a)(2).

PSC cap in numbers vs. weight: The Council requested clarification on the issues related to managing a PSC cap for PIBKC in the groundfish fisheries that is based on numbers of crab rather than the overall weight of crab accruing towards a set cap level. These issues relate to both the calculation itself, from observer data, as well as the fluctuation in cap levels as a result of using an annually-varying average weight calculation. Item C-3(a)(3) describes the method employed in the analysis to calculate an annual PSC cap in numbers as well as the annual variation in the PSC cap as a result of this calculation. Additional information on the methodology to calculate the numbers of crab from observer data on weight is described in the Management, Monitoring and Enforcement Chapter (see below).

Seasonal Allocation of a PSC cap: Following public comments in December 2011, the Council requested that staff explore the concept of a seasonal release of a fishery-wide PIBKC PSC cap for comparison against the sector allocations included in the analysis. No specific apportionment strategy was proposed. An examination of two possible seasonal apportionment strategies including preliminary results of the relative constraints by year are attached as Item C-3(a)(4). The proposed apportionment is shown for the PPA cap (only) at this time but could be explored for other cap options in the analysis should the Council choose to incorporate such a strategy into the existing suite of alternatives.

Monitoring, Management and Enforcement: Attached as Item C-3(a)(5) is the draft Monitoring, Management and Enforcement chapter for the forthcoming public review draft of the EA for this rebuilding plan. This chapter describes the harvest specifications process, inseason management, PSC estimation, observer data collection, accountability measures and monitoring and enforcement. The chapter specifically addresses the Council's requests from December in providing overviews of the issues of rollover mechanics of unused PIBKC PSC, increased observer coverage, whole haul sampling, seasonal apportionment of PIBKC PSC, and incorporation of discard mortality rates in inseason management. NMFS staff will be available to discuss the issues noted in this draft chapter as it relates to this analysis.

Based on the information presented, the Council may decide to modify alternatives at this meeting or notify the public that alternatives will be modified further in April which may delay the timing of final action, currently scheduled for April 2012.