

ADF&G FISHERIES REPORT: JUNE 25, 1991

NORTH PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Since the last Council meeting, the activities of fisheries managed under joint authority of the Council and the Alaska Board of Fisheries include: Crab, Dermersal Shelf Rockfish, Salmon and Sea Lions.

CRAB: The Opilio Tanner crab fishery closed on June 23th in the Western subdistrict. The department projected that the guideline harvest level, 68.9 million pounds for this subdistrict of the Bering Sea, would be reached on that date. This closure completed an all time record harvest of opilio Tanner crab. Our present estimate is that a total of 315 million pounds were taken during this season. The value of this past season's harvest may well exceed \$180 million; which would make it one of the most valued fisheries in this country. The highest single week's harvest also occurred during this period; 22.8 million pounds. The ability of the processing sector of the crab industry to handle such volume indicates that more than adequate capacity exists to handle regular harvests.

This record catch also produced an unprecedented amount of gear being fished. We believe a minimum of 90,000 to 100,000 crab pots were on the ground during the opilio season. The Board of Fisheries has expressed grave concern over the magnitude of this amount of gear and has noticed the public it will consider regulations to restrict the number of pots a vessel can fish during this winter's meeting cycle.

ROCKFISH: It is anticipated that the Southeast Dermersal Shelf Rockfish fishery will be open for the summer season. Between January 1st and June 21, the shore side landings have reached 226 mt. The TAC for this fishery is 425 mt. Assuming no unanticipated levels of bycatch in either the trawl or longline fisheries, the remaining TAC should provide for both a summer and fall directed DSR fishery. A mis-specification of 93 tons of Dermersal Shelf Rockfish by a single trawler precipitated concern that sufficient TAC might not be available, and that further harvest by both the directed and bycatch fisheries prior to the opening of the fall halibut fishery might lead to PSC status, and thus wastage of this resource during the halibut opening. A re-specification of most of this 93 tons has tempered some of these concerns.

TROLL: The preliminary total for the 1991 winter Southeast and Yakutat troll fishery is 42,239 chinook. Catches were quite high this winter, though effort was very low. Consequently, the catch per landing was very high, the highest since 1981. The catch of Alaskan hatchery produced chinook was also a record. A very preliminary total of 10,937, or 26%, were Alaskan hatchery fish.

During the first special June fishery, targeted upon accessing returning Alaska hatchery chinook, trollers caught 26,000 fish. Of these, approximately 22% were hatchery chinooks. A second opening concluded Monday, but catch figures are not yet available.

SEA LIONS: On June 13th, the department issued an Emergency Order closing areas within 10 nautical miles of fourteen identified Stellar sea lion rookeries located in the Cook Inlet, and in the Central and Western Gulf of Alaska to trawling of groundfish. This order was issued to close the territorial seas of the State of Alaska complementing the areas closed by the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect sea lions near rookeries.

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Since the last Council meeting, State management activities of fisheries under joint authority of the Council and the Alaska Board of Fisheries included: Crab, Dermersal Shelf Rockfish, and Troll Salmon. Additionally, the State passed regulations to aid NMFS in managing Steller Sea Lions.

CRAB: The Opilio Tanner crab fishery closed on June 23th in the Western Subdistrict. The department projected that the guideline harvest level of 68.9 million pounds for this subdistrict of the Bering Sea would be reached on that date. This closure completed an all time record harvest of opilio Tanner crab. Our present estimate is that a total of 315 million pounds were taken during this season. The value of this past season's harvest may well exceed \$180 million; which would make it one of the most valued fisheries in this country. The highest single week's harvest also occurred during this period; 22.8 million pounds. The ability of the crab processing industry to handle such volume indicates that more than adequate capacity exists to handle regular harvests.

This record catch also produced an unprecedented amount of gear being fished. We believe a minimum of 90,000 to 100,000 crab pots were on the grounds during the opilio season. The Board of Fisheries has expressed grave concern over the magnitude of this amount of gear and has noticed the public it will, during this winter's meeting cycle, consider regulations to restrict the number of pots a vessel can fish.

[In addition to the above information, the following events have occurred recently:

1. The Adak brown king crab fishery east of 175°W was closed on August 7 and the entire fishery will close August 15. As of August 1, ten vessels participating in the fishery had harvested 2.7 million pounds of crab, the lowest harvest since 1984/85 and well below the last five years average of 10.2 million pounds annually. The Department's review of this years fishing trends through July 1 indicated an overharvest may have occurred in the area east of 175°W and this part of the fishery was closed immediately. The Department is planning a survey of these stocks this fall to address the issues of recruit strength, stock distribution and growth parameters to better evaluate the effect of fishing on the reproductive potential of these stocks. Future management will be directed to not exceeding the 23% annual exploitation rate for legal mature crab as specified in the FMP (as opposed to size, sex and season management).
2. The St. Matthew blue king crab season opening scheduled for September 1, was postponed until September 14, pending receipt of information from the NMFS survey to be completed in mid-August. Based on last year's survey, a 20% decline in prerecruits (this year's recruits) had occurred. Until this year's survey is completed and the data reviewed, it is unwarranted to project a fishery. In 1990, the St. Matthew blue king crab fishery involved 31 vessels, fishing 6,000 pots and harvesting 1.7 million pounds with an exvessel value of \$5.7 million.
3. The 1991 Norton Sound red king crab fishery did not open as scheduled on August 1. Budget cuts eliminated ability of Department staff to insure

harvest remained within a 200,000 pound guideline. The increased likelihood of damage to stocks and subsequent subsistence and commercial fisheries from an unmanaged fishery was expected to outweigh short-term economic gains from conducting the 1991 fishery. The expected 1991 commercial fishery could have involved four to ten vessels with a harvest worth \$600,000 exvessel.]

ROCKFISH: The Southeast Dermersal Shelf Rockfish (DSR) summer season opened on July 1 and closed at noon on July 8 when the hook and line halibut bycatch quota was reached. Shore side landings of DSR between January 1st and June 21, took 226 mt of the 425 mt TAC. The remaining TAC should have provided for both a summer and fall directed DSR fishery. Instead, the high halibut bycatch rates observed in the directed sablefish and P. cod fisheries preempted completion of the DSR fishery.

The Council should note that when lacking a true estimate of the ABC, or a scientifically derived threshold, the default threshold level becomes defined as "the average harvest over the past five years". When Gulf-wide hook and line bycatch closures prematurely constrain DSR directed harvest, as occurred in 1990 and 1991, the artificially low catch of these two years becomes part of the five year average when determining the 1992 TAC. This is exceptionally problematic when one considers that actual removals of DSR have declined because both bycatch and directed removals stop when a Gulf-wide hook and line closure is initiated. Never-the-less, the new threshold will be reduced with an artificially low TAC, one which has little to do with the health of the resource - and one which could eventually preclude even opening the fishery for fear of triggering the overfishing definition. Furthermore, if fleets make economic choices not to fish a full TAC, those choices may constrain them in future years by decreasing the five year average. We suggest that this issue be addressed within the SAFE Report.

TROLL SALMON: The preliminary total for the 1991 winter Southeast and Yakutat troll fishery is 42,239 chinook. Catches exhibited high CPUE, the highest since 1981. The catch of Alaskan hatchery produced chinook was also a record; a preliminary total of 10,937, or a 26% hatchery add-on.

During the first special three day June fishery, which targeted on accessing returning Alaska hatchery chinook, trollers caught 22,520 fish. Of these, 24.8% were hatchery chinooks. A second opening, of a day and a half, caught 23,786 fish, but the hatchery component was only 10.9%. The low hatchery component was due in most part to a large non-hatchery catch which occurred in Sitka Sound. Experimental hatchery fisheries occurring in June produced an additional 13,944 chinooks - with a 42% hatchery catch component. Special terminal troll fisheries also occurred which added an additional 5,974 fish.

The regular summer season opened on July 1 and closed on noon of July 8. A harvest of 155,000 chinooks were taken; of which only a small percent were Alaskan hatchery stocks. The information is still preliminary, but we believe that the quota may have been slightly exceeded.

SEA LIONS: On June 13th, the department issued an Emergency Order closing areas within 10 nautical miles of fourteen identified Stellar sea lion rookeries located in the Cook Inlet, and in the Central and Western Gulf of Alaska to trawling of groundfish. This order was issued to close the territorial seas of the State of Alaska complementing the areas closed by the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect sea lions near rookeries.