

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
C1 Red King Crab Savings Area
December 9, 2022

The Council adopts the following purpose and need statement and alternatives for analysis.

The Bristol Bay red king crab (BBRKC) stock has declined and is currently at low levels, resulting in a closure to the directed fishery in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Estimated recruitment has been extremely low during the last 12 years and the projected mature biomass is expected to decline during the next few years. The best available science indicates the cause of the decline is a combination of factors related to continued warming and variability in ocean conditions.

Given the poor recruitment and low stock status of BBRKC, the Council intends to consider management measures focused on reducing BBRKC mortality from groundfish fishing in areas that may be important to BBRKC and where BBRKC may be found year-round, which may help increase stock abundance and promote achievement of optimum yield from the directed BBRKC fishery while minimizing negative impacts to affected groundfish fleet operations as well as target and PSC species.

Alternative 1. Status quo

Alternative 2. Implement an annual closure of the Red King Crab Savings Area and Red King Crab Savings Subarea to all commercial groundfish fishing gears. The existing closure for non-pelagic trawl gear is not changed.

The closure would be in effect:

Option 1: if ADF&G does not establish a Total Allowable Catch the previous year for Bristol Bay red king crab fishery.

Option 2: if the total area-swept biomass for BBRKC is less than 50,000 t.

These suboptions apply to either option:

Suboption 1: exempt hook-and-line gear from the closure

Suboption 2: exempt pot gear from the closure

Alternative 3. Implement a closure of Area 512 to fishing for Pacific cod with pot gear.

The closure would be in effect:

Option 1: if ADF&G does not establish a Total Allowable Catch the previous year for Bristol Bay red king crab fishery.

Option 2: if the total area-swept biomass for BBRKC is less than 50,000 t.

The analysis should provide an expanded discussion of the performance standard applicable to vessels in the directed pollock fishery and the regulatory definition of pelagic trawl gear. The expanded discussion should include background on the rationale for and information used to establish the performance standard and gear definition to help evaluate whether the performance standard and gear definition are meeting Council objectives.

The analysis should evaluate the potential trade offs and challenges of establishing dynamic closure areas to promote the Bristol Bay red king crab stocks.