


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, AP and SSC Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director 

DATE: January 8, 1992

SUBJECT: Crab Management

ACTION REQUIRED

1. Receive an overview of current crab management issues and review the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP).
2. Consider need for adjustments to the crab FMP.

BACKGROUND

In December the Council requested a general discussion of king and Tanner crab management for the January meeting. Regarding current management issues in Bering Sea crab fisheries, staff from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will report on the following issues:

1. C. opilio Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) and the Optimum Yield (OY) in the FMP;
2. Tanner crab hybrid management;
3. Tanner crab seasons; and
4. Pot limits for Bering Sea crab fisheries.

Item D-1(a) is my request to Carl Rosier for information on these issues.

Item D-1(b) summarizes the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crab FMP, and reviews major management measures such as GHL, OY and seasons; federal and state authority for Bering Sea crab management; and procedures for federal participation in State of Alaska crab management actions. Staff will present this report to the Council.

Item D-1(c) is a letter to the Alaska Board of Fisheries from the Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee raising concerns about the Board taking up hybrid management on short notice.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Richard B. Lauber, Chairman
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

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January 3, 1992

Carl Rosier, Commissioner
Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
P.O. Box 3-2000
Juneau, AK 99802

Dear Carl:

I am writing to request a report from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to the North Pacific Council on the State's management of king and Tanner crab at the Council's January 15-17 meeting in Portland. The ADF&G report in December piqued the Council's interest in crab management, especially concerning the 1992 harvest guideline for C. opilio and the management of Tanner hybrids, and the Council requested that a general discussion of crab management be placed on the agenda for the January meeting. Here are some of the topics of special interest to the Council:

C. opilio harvest guideline. ADF&G earlier set the C. opilio harvest guidelines above the plan OY. Since the Council meeting, ADF&G has reduced the C. opilio harvest guideline to the upper end of the OY range, but the Council remains interested in whether the OY range should be amended in the plan. Some in industry expect the stocks to decline, therefore concluding there is no need to increase the OY range to encompass current high abundance. It is not clear from NMFS's October 1991 report on the crab survey which way the C. opilio stocks are headed. Overall, large male abundance is up 15% (non-significant), pre-recruits are down 32% (significant), large females are up 28% (non-significant), and the outlook is for a high and stable population and high recruitment due to growth of pre-recruits into larger sizes. What is the Department's opinion on the need to adjust the OY in the plan?

Tanner crab hybrid management. Last April we received an excellent report from Denby Lloyd explaining management and enforcement of hybrids. It was in the form of a April 9, 1991 memorandum to you. Do you have any further information to report on how well hybrids are being managed, whether there are any biological problems or problems with identification? Is there a need for a bycatch program of some sort to control the take of C. opilio as hybrids in the C. bairdi fisheries?

Crab biology. A third area of interest to the Council is crab biology. What data are being collected from the fisheries to support conservation and management of the crab resources? What is the age of crab at recruitment and how long do they live? What are the dominant age classes in the fisheries and what does the future hold? The NMFS survey report is very useful in this respect, but any additional information you might have would be helpful.

Tanner crab seasons. Council members were interested in the timing of the seasons for C. bairdi and C. opilio. Should the C. bairdi opening east of 166 W longitude be shifted to January 15? Should both species have concurrent openings?

Pot limits. We understand that the Department will be proposing pot limits for Bering Sea crab fisheries and that they will apply to both king and Tanner crab. Pot limits are a Category 2 measure in the plan which specifies that the State can consider, within the constraints of available information, the following: (1) total vessel effort relative to the guideline harvest level, (2) probable concentrations of pots by area; (3) potential for conflict with other fisheries; (4) potential for handling mortality of target or nontarget species; (5) adverse effects on vessel safety including hazards to navigation; (6) enforceability of pot limits; and (7) analysis of effects on the industry. When will a report be available on these issues? Will there be coordination of the pot limits with the Council's proposed moratorium?

In general, I think the Council wants to be apprised of current and proposed management, how the plan is working, and whether in your estimation, it should be adjusted. Brent Paine is our contact and he will be in touch with Earl Krygier concerning the upcoming January Council meeting.

Thanks for your help on this subject. I look forward to seeing you at the Portland meeting.

Sincerely,


Clarence Pautzke
Executive Director

cc: Steve Pennoyer

Overview of the Fishery Management Plan for the Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands

History

The Tanner crab FMP, which included the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) areas, was approved by the Secretary of Commerce in May 1978. This plan was amended nine times. It adopted many of the management measures employed by the State.

In October 1981, the Council and State of Alaska (State) adopted a Joint Statement of Principles for the management of king crab fisheries in the BSAI area. This agreement formed the basis for interim management during the development of the Fishery Management Plan for the Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. The Federal regulations implementing the framework provisions of the king crab FMP were effective in December 1984. However, the Governor of Alaska never accepted the delegation of authority so the FMP was never fully implemented.

At its March 1986 meeting, the Council voted to suspend the regulations for the Tanner crab FMP because the FMP did not provide for management based on the best available scientific information, provide for timely coordination of management with the State, or conform to several of the Magnuson Act's national standards. In November 1986, the Tanner crab FMP was repealed by emergency interim rule and by Secretarial Amendment in May 1987.

At its September 1986, meeting, the Council appointed a workgroup of both industry representatives and Council members to develop a comprehensive management approach for crab fisheries off Alaska. The committee met in November 1986 and recommended that the Council's crab plan team draft a new FMP for both king and Tanner crabs for the BSAI area which would defer management to the State to the maximum extent possible. On June 2, 1989 the Secretary approved the king and Tanner crab FMP. The FMP was amended on February 26, 1991, to define overfishing for the 17 crab stocks in the BSAI area.

Goal of FMP

The king and Tanner crab FMP was written as a cooperative FMP between NMFS and the State. It contains a general management goal to maximize the overall long-term benefit to the nation of BSAI stocks of king and Tanner crabs by coordinated Federal and State management, consistent with responsible stewardship for conservation of the crab resources and their habitats.

100-3886-7131

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Objectives of FMP

The FMP contains seven specific objectives within the scope of the management goal. These relate to stock condition, economic and social objectives, gear conflicts, habitat, weather and ocean conditions affecting safe access to the fishery, access for all to the FMP process, and research and management. Several objectives may mesh in any given management decision.

Management measures

The FMP incorporates three types of management measures (Table 1). These measures may contribute to more than one objective. The first type of measures are fixed in the FMP and require a plan amendment to change. These measures include: legal gear, permit requirements, Federal observer requirements, and limited access.

The second type of measures are frameworked in the FMP. The State can change these measures following criteria set out in the FMP. These measures include: minimum size limits, guideline harvest levels, in-season adjustments, districts, fishing seasons, sex restrictions, pot limits, registration areas, and closed waters.

The third type of measures are under the discretion of the State. These measures include: reporting requirements, gear placement and removal, gear storage, vessel tank inspections, gear modifications, bycatch limits in crab fisheries, State observer requirements, and other measures.

The State is not limited to only these measures, but any new measures must be consistent with the FMP, the Magnuson Act, and other applicable Federal law, and may occur only after consultation with the Council. Type 2 and 3 measures may be adopted by State laws subject to the appeals process provided in the FMP.

Maximum Sustainable Yield

The maximum sustainable yield (MSY) is defined for the crab FMP as the average of the largest catches over a reasonable length of time, which can be taken continuously from a stock under current environmental conditions. Although the estimate of MSY is of questionable utility in managing crab stocks due primarily to highly variable recruitment, the MSY is estimated from the best information available.

Acceptable Biological Catch

The acceptable biological catch (ABC) is defined for the crab FMP as a seasonally determined catch or range of catches that may

differ from MSY for biological reasons. Given suitable biological justification the ABC may be set anywhere between zero and the current harvestable biomass less the biomass of mature males necessary to mate with a threshold level of females. Lacking other biological justification, the ABC is defined as the MSY exploitation rate multiplied by the size of the biomass for the relevant time period. Because king and Tanner crab fisheries are currently prosecuted on males only, females are excluded from the calculation of ABC in this FMP.

Optimum Yield

The optimum yield (OY) is the catch that provides the greatest overall benefit to the nation with particular reference to food production and recreational fisheries. OY is based upon the MSY for a given fishery, modified by relevant economic, social or biological factors. It may be obtained by a plus or minus deviation from ABC for the purposes of promoting economic, social or ecological objectives as established by law and the public participation process. The OY involves judgmental decisions that must be made by the Council based upon the best obtainable information. The OY for the crab FMP is defined as the amount of crab that may be legally landed under the requirements of the FMP and under the laws of the State of Alaska that have not been superseded by the Secretary, not to exceed 200 million pounds of king crab, 108 million pounds of Chionoecetes bairdi, and 333 million pounds of C. opilio in any one registration year.

Guideline Harvest Level

The guideline harvest level (GHL) is the proposed level of harvest that is less than or equal to ABC. The GHL is established pre-season, and usually expressed as a range. The sum of GHLs represent the allowable catch within the OY range.

Overfishing

Overfishing is defined as harvesting king and Tanner crab at a rate which exceeds the rate that produces MSY. How the definition is applied depends on the amount of data available for each of the 17 stocks.

Annual management report

The State (ADF&G lead agency) prepares an annual management report (normally in March or April) for the Board and the Council discussing the current biological and economic status of the crab fisheries, GHL ranges, and support for different management decisions or changes in harvest strategies. The NMFS and crab plan team provide input as appropriate.

Crab Interim Action Committee

A Crab Interim Action Committee provides oversight of the FMP and provides Council preseason and in-season review of management measures and other relevant matters. The Regional Director, NMFS, Commissioner, ADF&G and Director, Washington State Department of Fisheries or their designee serve on this committee.

Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee

The Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC) provides non-residents of Alaska a special means of access to the BSAI king and Tanner crab regulatory process. This committee is sanctioned by and operates under the auspices of the Council. It is recognized by the State as occupying the same consultative role on preseason and in-season management measures as all other existing ADF&G Advisory Committees. The PNCIAC is industry funded, but may request staff support from the Council, NMFS, and ADF&G as needed. The PNCIAC meets to review and advise the State and the Council on crab management issues, stock status information, and biological and economic analyses relating to the BSAI king and Tanner crab fisheries. The PNCIAC may request review of any relevant matter to the Crab Interim Action Committee.

Appeals Process

The crab FMP established a procedure for the Council and Secretary to participate in State preseason fisheries actions and NMFS review to determine consistency of the State regulations with the FMP, Magnuson Act, and other applicable Federal law. Representatives of NMFS, NOAA's Office of General Counsel, and the Council meet with the State and participate in the State's discussions and deliberations to assist the State in determining the extent to which proposed management measures fall within the scope of the FMP, the Magnuson Act, and other applicable Federal law.

Preseason Regulation Appeals

A member of the public who objects to a State crab regulation must first appeal through the State Administrative Procedure Act and must receive an adverse ruling. An appeal to the Board is not limited to a challenge that the proposed regulation is inconsistent with the FMP, the Magnuson Act, or other applicable Federal law. An appeal is first reviewed by the Crab Interim Action Committee prior to being reviewed by the Secretary.

The Secretary reviews measures adopted by the Board for consistency with the FMP, Magnuson Act, and other applicable Federal law. The Secretary considers comments submitted by the

Council on any measure adopted by the State during the 20 days after the end of the Board meeting. The Secretary may hold an informal hearing, if time permits, to gather further information concerning the regulations under review.

If as a result of its own review, or its review of comments received, or as a result of an appeal of an adverse decision in the State appeal process, the Secretary makes a preliminary determination that a regulation is inconsistent, then the Secretary will: 1) publish in the Federal Register a proposed rule that is consistent together with the reasons for the rule, and request comments for 30 days, and 2) provide actual notice of the proposed rule to the Council and the Commissioner of ADF&G. The State will have 20 days to request an informal hearing.

After reviewing public comments and any information obtained in an informal hearing, the Secretary may determine that the regulations are consistent and publish a withdrawal of the proposed rule, and so notify the State and the Council, or the Secretary may determine that the State regulations are inconsistent with the FMP, the Magnuson Act, or other applicable Federal law, and publish a final rule that supersedes the State regulations in the EEZ. If time is insufficient, the Secretary may use an expedited review procedure, possibly including deletion of the requirement for initial appeal to the State. The Secretary would provide for comment by the Council and the Commissioner of ADF&G if possible. However, if necessary, the Secretary can immediately publish in the Federal Register an interim final rule that supersedes application of any State regulation in the EEZ if the Secretary determines that State regulation is inconsistent and ask for comments on the interim final rule.

In-season Action Appeals

The in-season appeal process is limited similarly to the preseason review process, in that the Secretary will only consider appeals that the State regulation is inconsistent with the FMP, the Magnuson Act, or other applicable Federal law. An interested person may wish to pursue State appeal procedures along with the appeals procedure provided for in the crab FMP.

If someone believes that a State regulation is inconsistent, the person must, within 10 days of the issuance of the in-season action, submit to the Secretary in writing a description of the action in question and the reasons why it is inconsistent. The Secretary will immediately provide a copy of the appeal to the Crab Interim Action Committee and the Commissioner of ADF&G. If time permits, the Secretary will allow the Crab Interim Action Committee and the Commissioner of ADF&G five days for comment on the appeal.

If after review of the appeal and comments received from the Commissioner of ADF&G and the Council, the Secretary determines that the challenged action is consistent, the Secretary will so notify the appellant, the Commissioner of ADF&G and the Council. If the Secretary finds that the in-season action is inconsistent, and that for good cause the Secretary must immediately issue Federal regulations that supersede State regulations in the EEZ, the Secretary will publish in the Federal Register the necessary final Federal rule and request comments on the rule. If after review of the appeal and comments, the Secretary makes a preliminary determination that the action is inconsistent, but that Federal regulations to supersede the State regulation in the EEZ need not be implemented immediately, the Secretary will follow the procedure for preseason actions.

Table 1). Management measures used to manage king and Tanner crabs in the BS/AI management unit by category.

Category 1 (Fixed in FMP)	Category 2 (Frameworked in FMP)	Category 3 (Discretion of State)
Legal Gear	Minimum Size Limits	Reporting Requirements
Permit Requirements	Guideline Harvest Levels	Gear Placement and Removal
Federal Observer Requirements	In-season Adjustments	Gear Storage
Limited Access [Reserved]	Districts, Subdistricts and Sections	Vessel Tank Inspections
	Fishing Seasons	Gear Modifications
	Sex Restrictions	Bycatch Limits (in crab fisheries)
	Pot Limits	State Observer Requirements
	Registration Areas	Other
	Closed Waters	

PACIFIC NORTHWEST CRAB INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

P.O. BOX 97019

Redmond, WA 98073-9719

Tele: 206 881 8181 Fax: 206 882 1660

Richard C. White, Chairman

January 3, 1991

Michael Martin, Chairman
Alaska Board of Fisheries
P.O. Box 3-2000
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Dear Mr. Martin:

I was passed a memorandum the day before Christmas by the PNCIAC Secretary, Arni Thomson, advising me and other committee members that the Board of Fisheries would be considering changing the identification methodology for bairdi, hybrids and opilio tanner crab species at sometime during the course of its meeting in the community of Dillingham. He learned of this from one of the Westward staff members, who expressed concern about the crab industry being unaware that the issue was being scheduled.

Mr. Thomson noted in the memorandum that he had just received a copy of the Board of Fisheries Agenda "Roadmap" transmitted December 23rd, which did not identify any Bering Sea tanner crab issues. Agenda Change Requests are normally dealt with at the end of the meeting, which would have been January 14th. Three Agenda Change Requests were identified at the end of the agenda, dealing with Bristol Bay, none of which dealt with crab issues.

Thomson went on to explain that the Board of Fisheries had discussed enforcement concerns related to identification of the tanner crab species at its meetings in both October and November. Apparently, at the November meeting in Anchorage, the Board scheduled this issue as an Agenda Change Request for the January meeting in Dillingham. Without a doubt there was adequate time for public notice and scheduling of the issue on the "Roadmap" well before the Christmas Holiday Season.

Thus, we started the Christmas Holiday Season assuming that the issue had not yet been scheduled and that if it were to be addressed, it would be heard at the end of the meeting with other Agenda Changes. In any case, we would not have had enough time to provide the normal 30 day public notice for PNCIAC meetings, as noted in the Committee guidelines.

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I returned from the holidays this morning and I received a telephone call from Thomson stating that one of the ACC boat owners had received an updated "Roadmap" transmitted December 31st, which now showed Bering Sea tanner crab identification as the first item on the agenda- tomorrow morning, January 4th.

At this time we wish to request that the Board of Fisheries postpone deliberation and/or action on this issue until such time that adequate public notice and opportunity for public comments can be provided, as noted in the requirements of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab Fisheries Management Plan.

I would also like to make it known to the Board of Fisheries that in a quick poll of the PNCIAC members, I have determined that the Committee supports status quo in terms of the methodology presently being used by ADF & G to identify bairdi, hybrids and opilio tanner crabs. Further, they support the present size limits, as specified in 5 AAC 35.520 of the 1991 Commercial Shellfish Regulations, page 109. The members also feel that given 100% observer coverage on catcher processor vessels and floating processors and the presence of shoreside samplers and Dept. of Public Safety officials in Dutch Harbor, Akutan and St. Paul Island, that this should be adequate to monitor conservation concerns about the taking of undersize bairdi crabs.

Further, the members feel that changing the identification methodology to that of eye color and size limit only, will result in little or no harvesting of hybrids. The bulk of these animals, when mature, range in size from four to five inches. As presently being proposed by ADF & G, they will only be harvested at the minimum size for bairdi, 5.5 inches. Upon the closure of the bairdi season, no hybrids will be allowed. Over the season and the years, this will result in a substantial waste of a marketable resource.

In closing, I would like to mention that the PNCIAC has appreciated the cooperation and attention to PNCIAC concerns which the Board of Fisheries has demonstrated during 1990 1991.

Sincerely,



Richard C. White, Chairman
Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee

cc: Carl Rosier, Commissioner ADF & G

REVISED

**"ROADMAP"
ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
January 4 - 14, 1992
Dillingham**

**BRISTOL BAY
SPORT FISHERIES
AND
COMMERCIAL FINFISH FISHERIES**

I. AGENDA CHANGE REQUEST

Bering Sea District Tanner Crab Fishing Seasons, Size Limits and Identification
Define *bairdi* and *opilio* tanner crab by eye color.

II. BRISTOL BAY SUBSISTENCE FISHERY

5 AAC 01.310, Fishing seasons and periods.

- 144. DEFERRED
- 145 and 146. DEFERRED
- 147. DEFERRED

5AAC 01.325. Waters closed to subsistence fishing

- 148. DEFERRED

III. BRISTOL BAY SPORT FISHERIES (except Nushagak, Chinook and Coho)

5 AAC 67.020 Bag limits, Possession limits, and Size limits.

- 149. Establish a rainbow trout bag and possession limit of 5 fish 18 inches or less in size from November 1 through March 31.
- 150. Establish a rainbow trout bag and possession limit of 3 fish 18 inches or less in size from November 1 through April 9.

5 AAC 67. 035 Methods and Means.

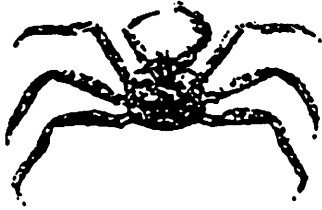
- 160. Define legal terminal gear in a portion of the Mulchatna River.
- 151. Repeal the prohibition on the use of helicopters for transporting sport anglers and sport caught fish in the Kvichak River drainage.
- 152. Prohibit the use of motorized boats from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from June 8 through October 31 on the Tazimina River.

5 AAC 67.050 Waters Closed to Sport Fishing.

- 153. DEFERRED

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	BRENT PERAK				

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES



NEWS RELEASE

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME



STATE OF ALASKA

Department of Fish and Game
Carl Rosier, Commissioner

Denby Lloyd, Director
Division of Commercial Fisheries

Westward Region

211 Mission Road
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

Contact: William E. Nippes
Westward Region
Shellfish/Groundfish
Management Biologist

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: December 6, 1991

ATTENTION BERING SEA CRAB FISHING INDUSTRY

This news release revises downward the guideline harvest level (GHL) for the *Chionoecetes opilio* harvest in the Bering Sea for the 1992 season.

A news release, dated September 18, 1991, announced a GHL of 400 million pounds of *C. opilio* based on the 1991 National Marine Fisheries Service trawl survey results for crabs four inches and larger. At that time, the *C. opilio* projection was subdivided into 351.1 million pounds in the Eastern Subdistrict and 48.9 million pounds in the Western Subdistrict.

The Federal Fishery Management Plan, adopted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, for the commercial king and Tanner crab fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, however, limits the GHL to the optimum yield (OY) range. For *C. opilio* this is 333 million pounds for any one registration year. Therefore, to conform to this specification, the 1992 *C. opilio* harvest for the Bering Sea will be limited to 333 million pounds of crabs four inches and larger in width of shell. This projection is further subdivided into 292.3 million pounds in the Eastern Subdistrict and 40.7 million pounds in the Western Subdistrict. These new subdistrict projections are based on a 16.25% decrease of those originally projected in September.

Record Effort Gathers for Bristol Bay Crab

Pot limits considered to slow rapid growth

by Bob King

"It was 'trick or treat' for crabbers that steamed out of Dutch Harbor on Halloween for the November 1 opening in Bristol Bay. The treat, of course, was a harvest of 18 million pounds of red king crab. The trick, however, was managing the fishery with a fleet some say is growing out of control.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimated an effort of 300 vessels on the grounds this year. That's a 25 percent increase from 1990. Fish and Game's Ken Griffin in Dutch Harbor said the added effort included new crab boats and converted trawlers. The growing effort worries Fish and Game managers.

In 1990, the fleet of 240 crabbers, using 70,000 pots, landed 20.4 million pounds of crab in 12 days. That's 1.7 million pounds a day. At the same rate per pot, this year's effort, with an estimated 90,000 pots, could land 2.2 million pounds a day and catch the 18 million-pound quota in just eight days.

Faced with larger fleets and shorter seasons, the Fish Board will consider proposals in March to impose pot limits.

"In order to conduct an orderly fishery, we have to slow down the effort in some respect," said Fish and Game's Bill Nippes. "If we're going to try to assess... what's out there, we gotta have some time to react.

"With the four-, five-day openings that we're experiencing at Saint Matthew, there's no time to assimilate any data from the fleet. It's basically a guess how long it's going to last before it opens and then do damage assessment at the

end," he said.

And the cost of missing the mark can be great. If biologists guess wrong and the fleet catches too much crab, the cost to the resource can be high, especially for the weaker stocks like St. Matthew. But if they close the fishery a day early, it can cost the industry plenty. Every day that Bristol Bay stays open is a 10-million-dollar decision.

"This year it appears that the estimates that we made [for St. Matthew] were fairly accurate, and our assumptions were correct," Nippes said, "but it all boils down to a guess on what's going to happen out there based on a survey and based on the weather, fishing effort and a number of factors that we really don't have very much control over. We want to slow it down a little bit so we can do in-season management again."

Not all fishermen agree, however, especially those who have invested in the "super crabbers" that are carrying heavy pot loads. One crabber attending the Alaska Fish Conference and Expo in Anchorage feared that pot limits could actually harm the resource. Fewer pots, he reasoned, would mean more pot lifts and more handling mortality on females and sub-legals.

Alyeska Seafood's Frank Kelty said he was concerned with the growth of the crab fleet, but he still opposed pot limits.

"It's hard for me to support it right now with the increase in the opilio Tanner season," said Kelty. "On some of these shorter fisheries it might be something that has to be looked into shortly. St.

Matthew, possibly Bristol Bay, I think you're going to have to take it season by season."

The good news for crabbers, however, is that there's a resource to argue about. It was just a brief decade ago that king crab stocks collapsed and seasons were closed. NMFS biologist Brad Stevens said that Bering Sea crab populations are generally healthy now, with some reservations.

"The Bering Sea red king population is sort of out on a limb," Stevens said. "The adult stock seems to be very healthy, but we don't see the juveniles coming in to replace them. All the other stocks, blue king crab, Tanner crab and snow crab seem to be doing very well. I'd characterize them all as healthy populations."

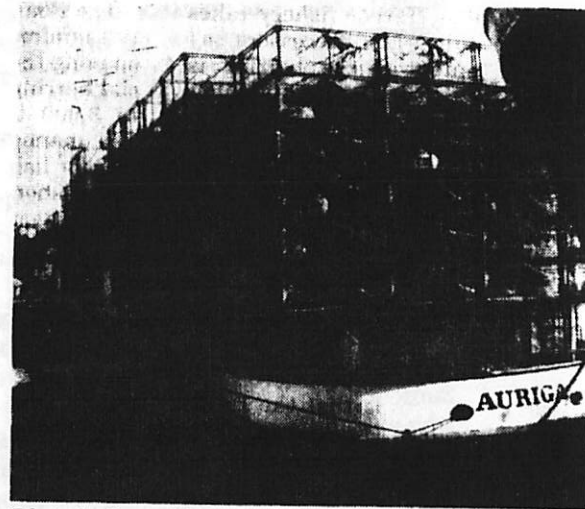
The reasons for the collapse and rebound in king crab populations in the Bering Sea are still not fully understood. The recent dramatic growth in opilio crab populations is equally confusing. Stevens, however, suggested that both may be the result of temperature fluctuations in the Bering Sea.

"Right now the Bering Sea is at average temperatures," Stevens said. "It went through a very cold period in the '70s and then a very warm period in the '80s. That could

have had some influence on the crab population. There are individual peaks and lows and those [low years] seem like they're associated with low recruitment."

That's just a theory, however, and at the recent Alaska Fish Conference and Expo, crabbers renewed complaints that they weren't getting their money's worth when it came to research and management of crab stocks.

"The crab industry in our area con-



(Photo by Bruce King.)

tributes 25 to 30 million dollars in raw fish taxes to the state," said Alyeska's Frank Kelty. "It's a tremendous amount of money but we only see cuts in ADF&G's shellfish budget and a lack of enforcement. We don't think we're getting the dollar back that we're putting in." □

Crab fleet tied up in Bering Sea; fishermen request season delay

By SUZANNE HANCOCK
Staff Writer and AP

Is it soft price or partially full shells keeping vessels tied at the dock in Dutch Harbor?

Although Bering Sea bairdi crab season opened Nov. 15, fishermen are holding out for a higher price.

But fishermen are also saying the market is soft because the product is inferior this time of year.

A closure now would reverse a 1990 decision to change the traditional bairdi crab fishery from January to November.

The Board may reconsider the timing of that fishery this week.

A petition circulated by the Alaska Marketing Association, a group representing 150 vessels, requests the Board to change the date for biological reasons.

"We've all tied up and agreed we don't want to go fishing until the product is better," said Hank Cinq-Mars, a crewman on the F/V Pacific Mist.

Cinq-Mars said until last year the fleet didn't fish until January when the crab were fuller.

The decision to open seven days after the closure of the Bristol Bay king crab season makes it easier for some vessels and processors to move from one fishery to another without hav-

ing to haul gear, he said.

The issue began over price, with fishermen asking \$1.75 per pound. Reportedly, only Unisea offered \$1.50.

Concern over quality and conservation of stocks surfaced following intense negotiations last week.

Jeff Stephan, United Fishermen's Marketing Association manager, says that organization supports the Jan. 15 opening.

"However we want a stable regulatory environment," Stephan said.

Stephan said when the board considered the issue, industry testified in favor of the change and now many are ready to testify that an emergency order should close the fishery until January.

He said there are many vessels "dressed up and ready to go."

"There is \$500,000 to \$600,000 worth of floating hardware sitting idle," said Richard Thummel, a spokesman for AMA.

Yesterday, Thummel said catch reports from the catcher processors are zero.

"This is darn good compliance from the catcher processors," he said.

Thummel said the week-long king crab fishery prior to this fishery showed fishermen that the Tanner stocks are not as good as last year.

He said they cannot fish west of 166 degrees Longitude and that is where the crab stocks are more robust.

Thummel said fishermen would target on high value crab and avoid the rest. The level of exploitation would be high and the stocks would suffer, he said.

The state fish board has the power to close the bairdi season.

"We're making no promises," said board chairman Michael Martin. "They have to convince this board there will be biologic damage or conservation problems."

Thummel said he hopes the board will consider the issue after they finish with the False Pass chum cap agenda item.

"They (the board) are here on other issues. We'll be patient, build a case, and consolidate support," he said.

Thummel, skipper of the 136-foot Provider, and four major processors now say the early opening was a mistake.

The Seattle-based processors have also thrown their support behind the closure proposal.

The board received letters from Trident Seafoods Corp., Peter Pan Seafoods Inc., Royal Aleutian Seafoods, Inc. and East Point Seafoods Inc. supporting the change back to January.

Thummel said processors not backing the closure are neutral and he expects more support.

Prices received for bairdi crab in 1990 were about \$1 per pound, about half the price earlier that year. The fall crab harvest also showed poor meat content, officials said.

Fall crab don't grow enough to fill out their shells following the seasonal molt, said Thorne Tasker, chairman of Alaska Joint Venture Seafoods Inc. Everyone in the industry fears consumers will receive "blanks," crab shells with little meat.

"Crab harvested during December has a reduced economic value," said Joseph T. Plesha, Trident's legal counsel, in a letter to the fish board. "Our experience from the 1990 bairdi crab season is that during November and December, bairdi crab have an 'in-fill' weight of only 65 percent to 75 percent."

Bairdi harvested after Jan. 1 are 85 percent to 95 percent filled out, he said.

Bairdi crab average 2 1/2 pounds to 3 1/2 pounds.

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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January 13, 1992

Dr. Clarence Pautzke
Executive Director
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, AK 99510

Dear Clarence:

This letter is in response to your request for a report from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on the state's management of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) king and Tanner crab for the council's January 15-17 meeting in Portland. In addition to the topical information included below, Earl Krygier of my staff will be present at the meeting to provide additional information and respond to questions. I understand that Dr. Ray Baglin of the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Alaska Regional Office also will be available.

C. opilio harvest guideline. The department has not formulated an opinion on the need to adjust the optimum yield (OY) in the federal crab fishery management plan (FMP), but I offer the following thoughts. While you conclude from the NMFS' October 1991 report that the overall outlook is for a high and stable population with high recruitment, I note that the only statistically significant indicator from the report is that pre-recruits were down, indicating that the 1993 guideline harvest level (GHL) may fall within the existing OY limit. The present OY limit was set on the basis of the best available information existing at the time, admittedly now old, and before the extensive development of the C. opilio fishery. However, it is not immediately clear that a single year's estimated harvestable surplus in excess of the existing OY limit requires action to change that limit. The biological and economic implications need to be examined.

In the coming months, the department plans to consider the overall strategy for managing Tanner crab in a series of internal and interagency discussions that may result in a new, detailed state management plan for Tanner crab. Though this will be a management plan developed under the Board of Fisheries, it will fall within

the framework of the federal crab FMP. The alternatives for increasing the OY limits will be considered as a part of this process. After these discussions, the department will be in a position to recommend whether or not to initiate a federal crab FMP amendment to adjust Tanner crab OY limits.

Tanner crab hybrid management. Hybrid Tanner crab constitute a small proportion of the total *Chionoecetes* stocks in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, less than 1 percent according to a recent departmental finding. Until the 1990-91 season, hybrids were not directly managed because their potential economic value was negligible. Working with industry, we attempted to manage some hybrid harvest in 1990-91, but the strategy adopted again led to unenforceable *C. bairdi* retention during *C. opilio* fisheries. Uncertainties in rapid field identifications of *C. bairdi*, *C. opilio*, and hybrid crab complicated enforcement of species specific size limits in the BSAI Tanner crab fisheries.

Preliminary results from a cooperative ADF&G-NMFS study of *C. bairdi*, *C. opilio*, and their hybrids, were reviewed in conjunction with development of regulations based on readily observable characteristics (eye color) to resolve these difficulties. Amended regulations recently adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (and emergency regulations made by the department for 1992) state that male Tanner crab with at least one red eye must be 5.5 inches or greater in shell width, while male Tanner crab without a red eye must be 3.1 inches or greater in shell width. These regulations will effectively control the take of undersized *C. bairdi* as hybrids in the *C. opilio* fisheries.

Crab biology. In addition to annual surveys of the crab stocks by NMFS and ADF&G, fish tickets, and the ADF&G-NMFS cooperative study mentioned above, the department conducts a crab fisheries observer program that collects data on catch, effort, length, shell condition, and disease (e.g., bitter crab), as well as samples for genetic studies. With respect to crab biology, the dynamics of *Chionoecetes* populations are not well known. The department has not yet developed population and harvest forecast models. However, the NMFS staff does project some short-term future trends from their survey results.

Tanner crab seasons. The Alaska Board of Fisheries set the current seasons within the allowable biological harvest periods, based on input from industry according to the process described in the federal crab plan. The department must ensure that fishing seasons meet our biological conservation mandate. Specifically, we are interested in preventing fishing during molting/mating periods in late spring and early summer when the crab are especially vulnerable to handling mortality. The timing of seasons within these biological constraints is, primarily, an allocation question

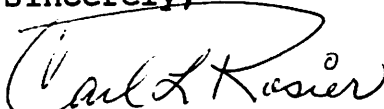
January 13, 1992

with economic implications. The Board of Fisheries would be able to address new proposals for Tanner crab fishing seasons in the BSAI at its March 1993 meeting.

Pot limits. The department has not proposed pot limits for the BSAI crab fisheries. Rather, the Alaska Board of Fisheries, concerned with the excessive number of pots presently fished in the BSAI fisheries, has scheduled a full discussion of the issue of pot limits for its March 1992 meeting. The board may take action to limit pots as a result of that discussion. The department will provide information on the likely impacts of alternative pot limits to assist the board in its discussion. A report will be available for the board meeting in March 1992. The department will, of course, attempt to ensure coordination between any action that the board may take on pot limits and any effective moratorium that may eventually be implemented through the council process.

Clarence, the annual report on the BSAI crab fisheries, which I understand is due in April, should provide additional information to the council on various aspects of the crab resources and fisheries. Federal funding for the ADF&G staffing necessary to handle the additional procedural, analytical and coordination requirements imposed by the crab FMP, should finally become available later this year. Once these resources are acquired, the department will be in a much better position to routinely interact with the council with respect to information on its management activities under the crab FMP. We look forward to continued cooperation in the successful management of the BSAI crab resources.

Sincerely,


Carl L. Rosier
Commissioner

cc: Denby S. Lloyd
Steve Pennoyer