

Changes to the crab harvest specifications timing cycle

Discussion document for Crab Plan Team, May 2022

The Council is interested in evaluating the timing of the BSAI crab and BSAI/GOA groundfish specifications cycles. Both for crab and groundfish, the timeframe is extremely compressed for AFSC and ADFG stock assessment authors to complete their assessments with the latest survey data and get them internally reviewed in time for the Plan Team meeting; and for the Plan Team to provide the SAFE report and minutes to the SSC with sufficient time for the SSC members to review prior to their scheduled meeting. Additionally for some crab fisheries, any delay as to when the Council can take action on setting ABC and OFL adds pressure on ADFG to set TAC quickly, and on the NMFS RAM division to issue quota shares, in order to meet the October 15th crab fishery opening date. The Council is concerned about the additional workload that this timeframe creates for the SSC and staff. The Council also remains committed to maintaining a robust quality of scientific information in the specifications process, as well as taking into account potential impacts to industry timeframes for marketing crab.

The Council recognizes that there are a lot of complex factors that went into designing the timing of the current specifications processes, and discussions need to involve stock assessment authors, the Plan Teams, and the SSC, as well as regional office staff and ADFG staff who implement the Council’s final specifications and open fisheries. At this point, staff are collecting input in order to be able to have a more comprehensive discussion with the SSC and Council, likely at the October Council meeting.

Current timing of crab specifications process

The following table provides an overview of the current timing of the crab specifications process at the Council, as described in the Best Scientific Information Available discussion document from April 2022¹.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Crab stock assessments developed												
CPT reviews alternate models	Modeling workshop; AIGKC											
SSC selects preferred models	Workshop report; AIGKC											
CIE review												
New data available	bottom trawl survey data; catch estimates											
CPT reviews assessments, models, buffers; recc ABC/OFL	NSRKC			AIGKC			BBRKC Snow crab Tanner crab PIBKC ¹ , PIRKC ² , SMBKC ¹					
SSC/Council reviews CPT report material; recc ABC, OFL	NSRKC			AIGKC			BBRKC Snow crab Tanner crab PIBKC ¹ , PIRKC ² , SMBKC ¹					
ADFG sets TAC/GHL	NSRKC			AIGKC PIGKC ¹ WAIRKC ²			(Same stocks as above)					

¹biennial; ²triennial

¹ https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/membership/SSC/BSIA_NPFMC_April2022.pdf

Brainstorm of ideas to date

Some initial ideas have been floated as part of the [discussions](#) at the SSC and Council in February 2022, and at the [public meeting](#) in March 2022. None of these ideas have yet been endorsed or evaluated. The flavor is captured here:

- Delay the Oct 15th crab fishery start date. Allows more time for author, CPT/SSC/Council process, ADFG/RAM implementation. Current schedule is especially difficult when data from final part of survey is critical to an assessment to be reviewed in September.
 - industry opposition to any delay as already challenging to meet new year markets; in fact, would prefer to have TACs set in September to provide more planning time
- Alternative: could we keep BBRKC on the current October SSC timeline, and delay review of other crab stocks until December? Provides more time for other authors to absorb new survey data.
 - Would that allow Council to set NSRKC ABC/OFL in December instead of Feb?
- Quality of review depends on having enough time. How rate the tradeoff between using an assessment that incorporates newest data (eg AFSC survey data for September assessments) and quality of science if author preparation and CPT/SSC review time is rushed?
 - To what extent does the timing start to affect ABCs, as if there is more uncertainty, larger buffers required?
- Adhere to strict cycle for considering alternative models in the spring and selecting a preferred model, so that authors can focus only on bringing in new data for setting specifications in fall
 - harmonize the crab and groundfish specifications cycles by aligning groundfish timing more with crab
 - Move towards more stability for assessments, so not all are open to change all the time

Questions for the Plan Team

- When are which new data available to update the stock assessments? How would a change in the timing (eg moving most crab specifications to December Council meeting) affect whether we are using the best available science? (fall stocks; NSRKC; AIGKC)
- Are there elements of the September CPT review process that could be moved earlier in the year? Eg, does the CPT spend time reviewing preferred models in September that could instead be determined at an earlier meeting?
- Example of potential CPT cycle:
 - May meeting – all model runs; informational items; final AIGKC (or could this be done in fall?)
 - Short late Sep meeting – BBRKC final assessment, survey results
 - Late Oct/Early Nov meeting – final assessments incl NSRKC; perhaps model runs for AIGKC
- Virtual vs in person: Council staff interest in keeping some Crab Plan Team meetings virtual (for budget, accessibility, use of staff resources). Which meetings/topics make sense?
- Are there pros/cons of harmonizing crab and groundfish specs timing from CPT perspective?
- Other ideas for resolving compressed fall timeframe?

Next steps

Staff will continue to solicit input on factors to be considered in any change to the timing of crab and groundfish harvest specifications over the summer, with a view to reporting back to the Council in October. Depending how comprehensive the conversation is with the Crab Plan Team, staff still needs to solicit input from crab assessment authors, NMFS inseason and RAM staff, and ADFG staff. No decisions will be made without opportunities for further public input.

In consultation with the Crab Plan Team Chairs, staff can provide a further update at the September Crab Plan Team meeting. It is not anticipated that any changes would occur in 2022.