



ALASKA MARINE
COMMUNITY COALITION

May 28, 2026

Ms. Angel Drobnica, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
1007 W. Third Avenue, Suite 400
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Agenda Item C5 – GOA Tanner Crab Protection Measures

On behalf of the Alaska Marine Community Coalition (AMCC), thank you for the opportunity to comment on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (the Council) consideration of Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Tanner Crab Protection Measures. AMCC is a fishermen-founded and fishermen-led organization working to advance sustainable fisheries, healthy marine ecosystems, and thriving fishing and subsistence communities across Alaska. Our work is grounded in the principle that fisheries management must be ecologically credible, publicly accountable, and responsive to the communities and ecosystems most affected by Council decisions.

AMCC supports the Council's action to strengthen protections for Tanner crab around Kodiak Island. Because Tanner crab are “prohibited species” in GOA groundfish fisheries,¹ AMCC urges the Council to move forward with a practical, enforceable, and reviewable conservation measure that protects known high-density Tanner crab areas while maintaining a pathway for ongoing evaluation of gear-specific impacts, displaced effort, and changing conditions. Specifically, AMCC requests the following:

(1) that the Council identify Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2 (nonpelagic trawl gear exclusion only) as the preliminary preferred alternative;

(2) that the Council add a new Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 3 that would exclude nonpelagic *and* pelagic trawl gear but still allow pot gear;

(3) that the Council add a new Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 3, *Implementation Review 1*, choice that requires a formal review after five (5) to ten (10) years of closure

¹ N. PAC. FISHERY MGMT. COUNCIL, FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE GROUND FISH FISHERIES OF THE GULF OF ALASKA 5 (Oct. 2024) [hereinafter GOA FMP]; 50 C.F.R. § 679.2 (2025).

implementation, which should occur only after the Council adopts a clear evaluation framework that includes: closure objectives, biological and fishery metrics, displacement analysis, gear-specific bottom-contact analysis, unobserved mortality, habitat impacts, and decision standards; and

(4) that any review of existing Kodiak crab closures be separated from this action and proceed only through a separate, formal conservation evaluation process.

AMCC will discuss these four (4) recommendations in turn.

First, AMCC recommends that the Council select Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2—but only as the preliminary preferred alternative. Alternative 2 (i.e., the Tanner Crab Closure) would enact a new closure on the east side of Kodiak Island—in areas known for consistently high densities and abundance of Tanner crab—to minimize interactions among the Federal groundfish fisheries and Tanner crab in the proposed areas.² Element 3 specifies that the area would exclude certain groundfish gear types.³ Option 2 would, more narrowly, restrict the closure area only to nonpelagic trawl gear.⁴ In summary, Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2, would create a new, east-side Kodiak Island closure *only* for nonpelagic trawl gear, which would be the clearest immediate path to action.

AMCC recommends Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2 because, by gear type, nonpelagic trawl gear catches the most Tanner crab Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) compared to pelagic trawl gear and groundfish pot gear.⁵ Further, nonpelagic trawl gear is the only gear sector restricted under both gear options in Alternative 2, Element 3, making it the most direct and administratively clear management target.⁶

While AMCC recommends that nonpelagic gear be subject to the closure for conservation purposes, AMCC understands this creates a fishery-access displacement issue. Nonpelagic trawl vessels rely heavily on the closure areas of interest—primarily for flatfish fishing.⁷ Additionally, the Tanner crab fishery provides an important winter revenue source that helps fishermen diversify beyond salmon, particularly in low-salmon years. The proposed closure would affect real fishing activity; however, just because nonpelagic trawl efforts overlap with important Tanner crab areas does not justify abandoning conservation efforts for a prohibited species. Statutorily, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is meant to prevent overfishing, rely on the best scientific information, and minimize bycatch.⁸ While

² N. PAC. FISHERY MGMT. COUNCIL, GOA TANNER CRAB PROTECTION MEASURES 30 (May 11, 2026) [hereinafter GOA TANNER CRAB].

³ *Id.* at 33.

⁴ *Id.* at 15.

⁵ *Id.* at 15.

⁶ *Id.* at 27.

⁷ *Id.* at 11, 25.

⁸ Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1851(a)(1), (a)(2), (a)(9) (2007).

curtailing adverse economic impacts is a real consideration, under the MSA’s National Standards, economic allocation shall not be the sole purpose for acting (or not) on a measure.⁹ Because nonpelagic trawl gear has a mobile bottom-contact footprint that poses a direct risk to Tanner crab and benthic habitat in known crab concentration areas, Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2 is the best currently offered and immediate choice. Thus, while displacement is a recognized issue, the primary goal is to protect fisheries above and, arguably, beyond economic interests.

Second, AMCC recommends that the Council add a new “Option 3” to Alternative 2, Element 3, that would exclude nonpelagic *and* pelagic trawl gear while still allowing pot gear. As discussed in AMCC’s other public-comment letter for the June 2026 Council meeting regarding *Agenda Item D1 – Pelagic Trawl Gear Research Updates*, pelagic trawl should not be excluded from concern simply because it is labeled “pelagic.” This Council should continue to evaluate the impacts of pelagic trawl gear when it contacts the seafloor and create a performance standard that accounts for bottom contact by pelagic gear types. Where pelagic trawl gear contacts the seafloor, that bottom contact may cause unobserved crab mortality, habitat impacts, and benthic disturbance that are not fully captured in standard PSC accounting.¹⁰ Thus, if the gear contacts the seafloor—pelagic or nonpelagic—it should be excluded from the Tanner Crab Closure area. Period. Thus, under a new “Option 3” to Alternative 2, Element 3 framework, AMCC requests that pelagic trawl bottom contact is thoroughly studied, evaluated, and held to an off-bottom standard. This aligns with the Council’s broader responsibility to ensure that gear performance, not the gear label alone, informs management treatment.

AMCC recommends pelagic or nonpelagic contacting-gear exclusions only, while still allowing pot gear. Pot gear is low-impact. It is stationary bottom-contact gear. It does not have the same known seafloor impacts as nonpelagic gear. That being said, as stationary bottom-contact gear, groundfish pot gear does contact the seafloor and may interact with crab or habitat; however, its operational footprint differs substantially from that of nonpelagic and pelagic gear types. Pot gear creates bottom contact. It has narrow risk factors including crab attraction, handling, gear loss, and localized habitat contact. Groundfish pot activity in the proposed closure areas has been minimal over the past decade, and the displacement analysis focuses primarily on pelagic and nonpelagic trawl fisheries.

When compared with mobile bottom-contact gear, including nonpelagic trawl gear—and any pelagic trawl gear operating in contact with the seafloor—which can sweep across broad areas during a tow, the net impact of pot gear is negligible. Nonpelagic gear (and pelagic trawl gear that interacts with the seafloor) creates a different type of risk to Tanner crab, benthic habitat, molting and mating crab, and crab that may be injured or killed without being observed as PSC. Accordingly, mobile bottom-contact gear and stationary bottom-contact gear do not operate the

⁹ *Id.* § 1851(a)(5), (a)(8).

¹⁰ N. PAC. FISHERY MGMT. COUNCIL, PELAGIC TRAWL GEAR INNOVATION DISCUSSION PAPER 23 (May 17, 2025) [hereinafter PELAGIC TRAWL GEAR DISCUSSION PAPER].

same way, do not create the same spatial footprint, and do not pose identical impacts. Thus, pot gear should not be collapsed into the same analytical category as “mobile bottom contact gear.” AMCC recommends Council to recognize that the current pot gear footprint is materially different from the mobile bottom trawl footprint, both in scale and operation.

Third, AMCC recommends that the Council add a new Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 3, *Implementation Review 1*, that requires a formal review of the closure area after five (5) to ten (10) years of implementation after the Council adopts a clear evaluation framework that focuses on the following: (a) the closure’s conservation objective; (b) trends in Tanner crab abundance and distribution; (c) information on mature males, mature females, juveniles, and egg-bearing females (where available); (d) Tanner crab PSC inside and outside the closure area; (e) unobserved mortality and gear-interaction risk; (f) habitat impacts and bottom-contact information; (g) pelagic trawl bottom contact and compliance with the intent of pelagic operations; (h) pot gear effort and any future expansion within the proposed closure area or adjacent areas; (i) spatial and temporal displacement of fishing effort; (j) whether displaced effort increases risk in other Tanner crab concentration areas; (k) whether dynamic tools are needed to complement the static closure; and (l) clear decision standards for any future modification. While comprehensive, this review should not automatically trigger the reopening of the area, but rather serve as a conservation evaluation. A five- to ten-year period would allow the Council to evaluate multiple years of crab survey data, fishery behavior, displacement patterns, and gear-specific impacts, rather than overreacting to a single anomalous year.

Fourth, AMCC recommends that Council separate any review of existing Kodiak crab closures from this Tanner Crab action, as Kodiak crab closures should proceed through a separate, formal conservation evaluation process.¹¹ Alternative 3 and the existing closure review—Alternative 2—are analytically distinct. Alternative 2 defines options for closure areas, durations, or gear options.¹² By contrast, Alternative 3 seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of existing Federal crab protection closures around Kodiak Island. While the Council indicates Alternative 3 would not lead to rulemaking or an amendment in its current form because the Council has not identified specific elements of existing federal crab protection closures that it wishes to modify or remove.¹³ Alternative 3 should be separated entirely from the current discussion that pertains to a new closure area—not preexisting ones.

For example, current trawl-related closures, including Marmot Bay Tanner Crab Protection Area,¹⁴ should not be folded into this new protection action and should not be considered for reopening without broader criteria that address habitat protection, bycatch reduction, subsistence

¹¹ GOA TANNER CRAB, *supra* note 2, at 17.

¹² *Id.* at 6, 27.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.* at 198 (noting that Marmot Bay Tanner Crab Protection Area is closed to all fishing with nonpelagic trawl gear to reduce the incidental catch of Tanner crab in GOA groundfish fisheries and to reduce negative impacts of nonpelagic trawl gear on Tanner crab).

resources, marine mammals, and nearby communities such as Ouzinkie and Port Lions.¹⁵ Any future review of existing closures should evaluate the original objective of each closure, whether that objective remains valid, whether it has been met, whether crab vulnerability or habitat importance has changed, and whether modifying or removing the closure would increase PSC, unobserved mortality, bottom contact, habitat risk, or community impacts. Thus, when the Council identifies the elements of the existing closure areas it may wish to modify or remove, it will require a separate quantitative analysis aside from the present one.¹⁶

In conclusion, AMCC respectfully requests that the Council select Alternative 2, Element 3, Option 2 as the preliminary preferred alternative, while also adding a new option that would prohibit both pelagic and nonpelagic trawl gear but continue allowing pot gear. AMCC further recommends requiring a formal review after five (5) to ten (10) years, under a defined evaluation framework that addresses biological, habitat, bycatch, and fishery impacts. Finally, AMCC recommends that any reconsideration of existing Kodiak crab closures occur separately through an independent conservation review process. This ensures a practical and meaningful step toward protecting Tanner crab, crab habitat, small-boat fishing opportunities, and public trust in fisheries management.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stratton

Michelle Stratton
Executive Director

Lancee Whetman

Lancee Whetman
Fisheries Program Manager

¹⁵ *Id.* at 77 (“Chiniak/Larsen Bay/PortLions/Old Harbor/Ouzinkie shows the highest relative dependence, with Tanner crab accounting for 8.3% of total community revenue, despite a smaller fleet and lower absolute earnings.”).

¹⁶ *Id.* at 17.