C3b Council Motion
Pelagic Trawl Gear Innovation
June 8, 2025

The Council intends to use the gear innovation research and other ongoing research to better quantify and understand current bottom contact by pelagic trawl gear types and will use that to evaluate management measures to further minimize the impacts of pelagic trawl gear in areas that are currently closed to nonpelagic trawl gear and to address potential unobserved crab mortality, unless the industry can document limited seafloor contact and/or impacts.

1. **2026 Measures for Dynamic Spatial Closures**. While the gear innovation work continues, and consistent with the February 2024 Council motion, the Council requests the Bering Sea pollock industry to develop dynamic spatial closures for the 2026 A season to protect Bristol Bay red king crab based on the new winter pot surveys and tagging data, and other recent data sources. Salmon bycatch should continue to be the highest priority for avoidance; thus, the measures should include mechanisms to consider salmon bycatch (e.g., rate-based exclusion) that would override identified closures. The Council requests information back from the industry at the October 2025 meeting during B reports.

2. **Gear Innovation Research and Timelines.** The Council appreciates the Gear Innovation Initiative to improve understanding of pelagic trawl gear interactions with benthic habitat, potential unobserved mortality of crab, and the enforceability of bottom contact characteristics of pelagic trawl gear. The Council requests an update on Gear Innovation Initiative progress at the April 2026 meeting, at which time the field study portion of the project for catcher processors is expected to be complete.

   The Council encourages the industry Gear Innovation Initiative Workgroup to identify specific gear modifications, fishing practices, and/or technology that further minimizes impacts on areas that the Council has identified as meriting protection from bottom contact and resolves uncertainty regarding potential unobserved crab mortality events from crab/pelagic trawl interactions. In 2026, the Council intends to use the updated bottom contact estimates in the Fishing Effects model and gear research to develop options to revise the performance standard for pelagic trawl gear operations, based on previously stated Council objectives and available information.

   The Council also requests staff prepare a public document that includes the timelines and milestones on the Gear Innovation Initiative, existing or new EFPs on gear modifications, and any other new research to fill the data gaps for pelagic trawl gear identified by the Unobserved Fishing Mortality Working Group.

3. **Update to Fishing Effects Model.** The Council requests the Fishing Effects model be updated with the refined and current information to improve bottom contact estimates. The Council affirms the Fishing Effects model is the peer-reviewed, best available tool to assess the effects of fishing on essential fish habitats in Alaska.

4. **Other Research Updates**. The Council requests an update on crab research from the Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation and from Principal Investigators on the EFP to test modifications to the footrope of pelagic trawl gear at the April 2026 meeting.