BSAI Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP): Excerpts on accountability measures

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BSAI Crab FMP - https://files.npfmc.org/fmp/Crab/CrabFMP.pdf

BSAI Crab FMP Amendment 38: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2011/08/05/2011-19945/fisheries-of-the-exclusive-economic-zone-off-alaska-bering-sea-and-aleutian-islands-king-and-tanner

ADF&G NSRKC Advisory Announcement: https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1833094679.pdf

Background

The Council, SSC, and Crab and Scallop Plan Team (CSPT) annually review assessment documents, status, harvest specifications, and NMFS's determination of whether catch exceeded the ABC (or ACL) in the previous crab fishing year. During the 2026 crab year, the total fishing mortality of Norton Sound red king crab (NSRKC) was 338,628 lb (0.154 kt) which exceeded the ABC (or ACL) by 13.6% but was below the OFL (see ADF&G Advisory Announcement linked above). For 2026, the NSRKC OFL was 426,000 lb (0.193 kt), the ABC was 298,000 lb (0.135 kt), and the GHL was 268,000 lb.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that FMPs include accountability measures to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct overages of the ACL if they do occur. This document provides excerpts from the FMP for BSAI king and Tanner crabs that relate to accountability measures to support discussion of the NSRKC final SAFE topic during the Nov. 5, 2026, Crab and Scallop Plan Team (CSPT) meeting.

In summary, there is a distinction between accountability measures used for prevention, and those used in the harvest specification process to address overages. Measures to address overages are required in the fishing season following the overage. Accountability measures are implemented by the Council, NMFS, and the State according to the respective roles and responsibilities under the FMP.

Section 3.2, pg. 22:

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that FMPs include accountability measures to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct overages of the ACL if they do occur. Accountability measures to prevent TACs and GHLs from being exceeded have been used under this FMP for the management of the BSAI crab fisheries and will continue to be used to prevent ACLs from being exceeded. These include: individual fishing quotas and the measures to ensure that individual fishing quotas are not exceeded, measures to minimize crab bycatch in directed crab fisheries, and monitoring and catch accounting measures. Accountability measures in the harvest specification process include downward adjustments to the ACL and TAC in the fishing year after an ACL has been exceeded.

Section 3.2.1, pg. 24:

As an accountability measure, the total catch estimate used in the stock assessment will include any amount of harvest that may have exceeded the ACL in the previous fishing season. For stocks managed under Tiers 1 through 4, this would result in a lower maximum ABC in the subsequent year, all else being equal, because maximum ABC varies directly with biomass. For Tier 5 stocks, the information used to establish the ABC is insufficient to reliably estimate abundance or discern the existence or extent of biological consequences caused by an overage in the preceding year. Consequently, the subsequent year's maximum ABC will not automatically decrease. However, when the ACL for a Tier 5 stock has been exceeded, the Scientific and Statistical Committee may decrease the ABC for the subsequent fishing season as an accountability measure.

Section 3.5.2, pg. 63:

The FMP authorizes the State to set preseason TACs and GHLs under State regulations. Seasons or areas are closed when the TAC or GHL is reached. TACs are set for the crab fisheries under the CR Program: C. opilio, C. bairdi, Bristol Bay red king crab, St. Matthews blue king crab, Pribilof Islands red and blue king crab, Aleutian Islands golden king crab, and Western Aleutian Islands red king crab. GHLs are set for the remaining crab fisheries: Pribilof Islands golden king crab and Norton Sound red king crab. ADF&G may close a fishery with a GHL before or after the GHL is achieved based on current in-season information (Section 3.5.10). TACs and GHLs for each fishery will be reported in the Council's annual SAFE Report, along with the OFLs and ABC/ACLs. The State will take into account the following factors, to the extent information is available, in developing harvest strategies or setting TACs and GHLs: (1) whether the ACL for that stock was exceeded in the previous year; (2) stock status relative to the OFL and ACL; (3) estimates of exploitable biomass; (4) estimates of recruitment; (5) estimates of thresholds; (6) market and other economic considerations; (7) additional uncertainty; and (8) any additional factors pertaining to the health and status of the stock or the marine ecosystem. Additional uncertainty includes (1) management uncertainty (i.e., uncertainty in the ability of managers to constrain catch so the ACL is not exceeded, and uncertainty in quantifying the true catch amount) and (2) scientific uncertainty identified and not already accounted for in the ABC (i.e., uncertainty in bycatch mortality, estimates of trends and absolute estimates of size composition, shell-condition, molt status, reproductive condition, spatial distribution, bycatch of non-target crab stocks, environmental conditions, fishery performance, fleet behavior, and the quality and amount of data available for these variables).
The State will establish the annual TAC or GHL for each crab stock at a level sufficiently below the ACL so that the sum of the catch13 and the State's assessment of additional uncertainty do not exceed the ACL. The State may establish the annual TACs below such a level to account for the other factors identified above. If an ACL is exceeded, the State will implement accountability measures in the fishing season following the overage to account for the overage through a downward adjustment to the TAC or GHL for that species by an amount sufficient to remedy the biological consequences of the overage.

Appendix A, pg. A-2:

List of Amendments to this FMP, including Amendment 38 implemented in Aug. 2011, which established ACLs and accountability measures. For more information, see the link at the top of the document.

Per the Response to Comments for FMP Amendment 38/39:

Federal accountability measures will be implemented during the ABC-setting process as the Council's Crab Plan Team and the Scientific and Statistical Committee determine the appropriate downward adjustments to the ACL in the fishing year after an ACL has been exceeded. Additionally, given that the State sets the TAC under the FMP, Amendment 38 also includes accountability measures for the State to exercise in the annual TAC-setting process. Under the FMP, the State has some discretion to determine the most appropriate method to account for any catch above the ACL in setting the TAC for the subsequent fishing season.