

Gordon Kruse's Oral Comments to the Crab Plan Team on the Unobserved Fishing Mortality Working Group Report

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My name is Gordon Kruse. I am a professor emeritus with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and I am currently a science advisor to the Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral comments on the Unobserved Fishing Mortality Report.

The working group has done an excellent job to address the Council's request. An important take-home message is the great need for directed field studies to address data gaps. Among gears, research on the lethality of pelagic trawl gear was identified as the highest priority owing to "the expectation that this gear has the potential for a relatively high ratio of unobserved:observed encounters with crab." While more progress has already been made on non-pelagic trawls and pots, there are important research needs for those gears, as well.

In addition to working group considerations of size and life-stage vulnerabilities of crab to gear encounters, new field research should distinguish crab-trawl encounters during molting/mating periods versus intermolt periods as crabs in softshell condition are extremely vulnerable to disturbance.

So, what's next? It is important that the working group report serves as a foundation to stimulate future research into UFM. The Council might:

- (1) include UFM research in their top ten research priorities to facilitate uptake by the North Pacific Research Board and other funding organizations; and
- (2) consider a workshop to review available information in greater detail and to stimulate the development of collaborative research proposals. Such a workshop could include gear experts, industry partners, and state and federal agency field researchers.