D1 Pelagic trawl gear performance standard
Council Motion
June 8, 2026

The Council intends to evaluate and reduce bottom contact in pelagic trawl gear fisheries to continually improve our management, particularly in areas in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska closed to non-pelagic trawl gear in light of the continuing depressed state of red king crab populations. Because data are lacking regarding the magnitude of unobserved crab mortality from interactions with pelagic trawl gear, the Council is considering additional regulatory measures and intends to work with the pollock industry on adaptive approaches that focus on reducing uncertainty as well as incentivizing gear modifications.

The Council requests a discussion paper identifying options for viable and enforceable mechanisms to reduce bottom contact, building on the June 2025 discussion paper by identifying areas that are currently closed to vessels using non-pelagic trawl gear and open to vessels using pelagic trawl gear, summarizing pelagic trawl effort in those areas during the most recent ten years, and characterizing baseline bottom contact using the best available information.

To form the basis for regulatory alternatives, the paper should address ways to operationalize and implement in regulation reduced bottom contact in specific management areas, such as:

- whether a maximum bottom contact rate based on best available information is feasible to regulate at a vessel, sector or Bering Sea cooperative level;
- the feasibility of implementing a swept-area cap at a vessel, sector or Bering Sea cooperative level; and/or
- verifiable pelagic trawl gear modifications, technologies, or operational standards.

The paper should discuss each identified mechanism above for reducing pelagic trawl bottom contact relative to its effects on the amount of bottom contact, CPUE, fishing time, effort displacement, and total impact per unit of target catch. Further, the paper should consider and describe any potential trade-offs that may result in changes in PSC associated with reduced bottom contact measures.

The Council reaffirms its June 2025 motion that the Fishing Effects model be updated with refined bottom contact estimates as a baseline from which to improve. The Fishing Effects model is the peer-reviewed, best available tool to assess the effects of fishing on benthic habitats in Alaska and the most recent review concluded that the adverse effects of fishing activity on EFH are no more than minimal or temporary. The Council recognizes the Fishing Effects model is a habitat-effects tool and does not by itself estimate unobserved crab mortality from fishing.

The Council also endorses the continued work and completion of the gear innovation work, relevant ongoing EFPs, and BSFRF crab habitat and species distribution research.