

## **22. Modifying Timing of Crab Assessments**

Sarah Rheinsmith (NPFMC) summarized the Council's evaluation of proposed changes to the crab harvest specifications timing cycle and directed questions to the CPT for general discussion. The Council acknowledges that there is an extremely compressed schedule for survey data, assessments, review and the October 15<sup>th</sup> crab fishery opening. Sarah reviewed some proposed changes including: 1) delaying the October 15<sup>th</sup> fishery start date, 2) delaying review of all crab stocks except BBRKC to December, and 3) standardizing crab specifications cycles to align with groundfish.

During discussions, the CPT emphasized that the January workshop is of great importance to stock assessment authors because many assessment models are still moving to GMACS and a winter workshop allows authors time to incorporate changes before the May meeting. The CPT recommends that dedicated time be provided for an in-person workshop each January, and noted that while the workshop doesn't need to be in conjunction with a CPT meeting, travel logistics are simplified when the two coincide. The CPT also noted that the availability of data from the NMFS northern Bering Sea bottom trawl survey determines the timing for the stock assessment of NSRKC, although it is possible that the assessment author may have time to incorporate new data by a December deadline.

The crab industry expressed concern with changes to the crab harvest specifications timeline because a delay in fishery opening dates provides little time to make decisions regarding quota allocation, as well as the transport of vessels from Seattle and personnel to staff processing plants. The CPT agreed that shifting to ABC/OFL/TAC setting in December is too late for industry to consider fishing a January opening.

The CPT emphasized that industry should have ample time to weigh in before any decisions on changes to the harvest specifications timeline are made

The CPT also noted a suite of other concerns related to changes to harvest specifications including the potential ramifications for rebuilding plans and bycatch accrual with a gap-year in the ABC and OFL as the timeline initially shifts to a calendar year. CPT members involved in the ADF&G TAC setting process also noted that these meetings are very labor intensive and it will be difficult to conduct TAC setting for most BSAI crab stocks at the same time. From an administrative side, any changes to crab fishery seasons may require other federal fisheries seasons to be adjusted accordingly.

Finally, the CPT expressed concern with including crab assessments for SSC review in December alongside groundfish assessments, worrying that time for critical review and public testimony may be compromised.

The CPT concluded the discussion by acknowledging that the number of proposed model runs recommended at the May CPT meeting is often burdensome for assessment authors given the timeframe of the September meeting. It was suggested to streamline the May CPT meeting by recommending two models to move forward in September: the base model with new data and the new preferred model, and then assessment authors can prioritize other models as time allows. The CPT looks forward to continued discussions regarding changes to the crab harvest specifications timing cycle and encourages the Council to solicit input from individual assessment authors.