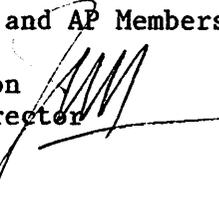


M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: Jim H. Branson
Executive Director 

DATE: May 16, 1983

SUBJECT: Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King Crab Fishery Management Plan

ACTION REQUIRED

Council review of Board of Fisheries regulatory actions concerning the 1983 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands king crab fishery.

BACKGROUND

In October 1981, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and the Alaska Board of Fisheries formally adopted the Joint Statement of Principles on the management of domestic king crab fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands area. In that document, the Board is required to provide a written statement explaining the basis for any change in regulation. The Board has prepared a written report and it is included in your notebooks as Agenda item D-3(a). A summary table of all the Board's BS/AI king crab action is also enclosed for your information [item D-3(b)].

The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King Crab FMP, the Regulatory Impact Review, and implementing regulations were submitted for Secretarial review on June 1, 1982. The Secretarial review period has been extended pending receipt of minor editorial and technical changes to the FMP, the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and revised set of implementing regulations. These documents are nearing completion and it is anticipated that the Secretary will act on the king crab FMP in the near future.

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
DECISIONS REGARDING
MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC KING CRAB FISHERIES
IN THE
BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AREA
March, 1983

During its March 1981 meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries developed the Joint Statement of Principles on the Management of Domestic King Crab Fisheries and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BS/AI) King Crab Fishery Management Framework. These documents, which were prepared in cooperation with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, clearly define the roles of both entities in the management of the domestic king crab fishery in the BS/AI area. The Board and Council formally adopted the Joint Statement of Principles in October 1981.

In conformance with the above mentioned documents and recognizing its responsibility for the management of the domestic king crab fisheries in the BS/AI area, the Board received public testimony, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Alaska Department of Public Safety (ADPS), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff recommendations, and discussed at length the issues related to regulations controlling these fisheries during its March 1983 meeting. During a portion of their meeting, the Board met jointly with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to consider issues of mutual concern. The decisions of the Board are presented in summary. Further detail is available on the tape record of the Board meeting.

Areawide Provisions

During the 1982 spring meeting, the Board expressed its intention to revise harvest strategies for all Westward king crab fisheries, recognizing a need for flexibility in exploitation rates based on stock conditions. The Board at the 1983 meeting, acting in conjunction with the Council, unanimously approved a Plan Maintenance Team proposal to update the management framework by including a table which provides for exploitation rates ranging from 0 to .6 based on stock abundance. The Board also heard testimony which indicated that the current Norton Sound king crab population is depressed and is showing some signs of infertility; it is possible that an acceptable level of commercial harvest may effectively reduce the availability to subsistence users. In order to provide for subsistence needs in the area, the original table was amended to reduce exploitation rates in Norton Sound to half of the permissible level.

Longlining for brown crab was approved in areas R, O, and Q with no limit on the number of pots which may be joined in a string.

The fishery may only be conducted under terms of a permit to be issued by ADF&G. The Board recognized the problem of gear loss in this developing fishery due to rapidly increasing water depth in those areas which represent the normal range of the brown crab stocks. ADPS concerns over enforcement problems during concurrent red and brown crab seasons were addressed by the permit provision and by the fact that these fisheries are physically separated due to differing stock depth ranges.

Four proposals which would have reduced the current 6.5 inch size limit for brown king crab throughout the area were rejected based on ADF&G and NMFS staff concerns that there was insufficient biological information to justify this action. The Board placed a high priority on the collection of these data and directed that a letter be sent to NMFS and the Council requesting increased research efforts. Sufficient biological information exists, however, to support an additional proposal for a May 1 - September 30 season and a 5.5 inch size limit on brown crab in the general section of the Area Q Northern district. Surveys indicated that an adequate stock is available and that a season with a reduced size limit is appropriate. Norton Sound was excluded from this action in response to the concerns of subsistence users who feared that a commercial brown king crab fishery in their area would further reduce the availability of crab to local residents.

The Board rejected a proposal which would have permitted ADF&G to allow a vessel additional fishing time if it aided another vessel in distress during an open fishing season. Proponents maintained that this measure was necessary due to the lack of adequate Coast Guard search and rescue capability in the area. Fishermen would not hesitate to render aid if assured that lost fishing time would be replaced. The Board, however, decided that it would be difficult to determine which cases merited additional fishing time and concluded that the proposed regulation provided too much opportunity for abuse.

Seasons

After hearing considerable public testimony regarding appropriate season openings, the Board adopted the following list of opening dates:

Norton Sound (Q)	August 1
Saint Matthew (Q)	August 20
Pribilof (Q)	October 1
Bristol Bay (T)	October 1
Adak (R)	November 10
Dutch Harbor (O)	November 10

Opening dates were generally later than in previous years; a principal Board concern while establishing these dates was maintaining high quality in the catch. Representatives for area processors testified that even a two week season delay would produce a meaningful improvement in meat recovery rates. In

addition, an attempt was made to provide a logical progression of openings southward during the season. It was recognized that the later seasons would provide more separation between the king crab and summer salmon seasons and thus permit a more orderly transition between the two. Although smaller boats might have some difficulty with these seasons due to deteriorating weather conditions later in the year, maintenance of a high quality catch was judged more important. All seasons addressed the need to protect crab during their mating and molting periods. ADF&G staff stated, however, that in order to maximize the reproductive capability of the female crab population, some safeguards might be necessary if the summer surveys demonstrated the incidence of female crab reproductive problems. It may be necessary to have no open fishing season in some areas, despite action by the Board which sets a season opening.

Bering Sea Fishery

A staff proposal to establish a pot storage area in the central Bering Sea was unanimously approved. Industry representatives withdrew their proposal for an alternative storage site in order to support the staff recommendation. The approved site is midway between the Saint Matthew and Pribilof fishing grounds and is larger than previous storage areas.

The Board rejected two proposals which would have increased the zone of commercial closure around St. Lawrence, King, and Little Diomed Islands. Subsistence users argued that crab stocks in the area were depressed, that NMFS trawl surveys showed fewer crabs near the islands than in open ocean areas, and that even a small commercial harvest could adversely affect the availability to subsistence fishermen. The Board felt that the current 3 mile closure zones around these islands were adequate to protect subsistence uses in the area.

Adak Fishery

The Board approved a housekeeping amendment to the description of the Adak area which expanded the area seaward to the 800 fathom depth contour and westward to the US/USSR Convention Line. It was discovered that the previous description did not completely cover the grounds used in this fishery.

As part of the general discussion which set season opening dates, the Board also established the specific closing date of April 15 for the brown crab fishery. Fishermen had requested that ADF&G set a specific date rather than use an emergency order closure so that they might have a date to use for planning purposes. The April 15 date was selected for biological reasons since it appears to approximate the start of the molting period.

Dutch Harbor Fishery

A proposal which would have established a pot limit for king crab vessels in the Dutch Harbor area was rejected. Although it

recognized that something must be done to reduce effort on depressed king crab populations, the Board feared that pot limit regulations were unenforcable. ADPS testified that enforcement of pot limit regulations was difficult but possible, if vendors who supply pot identification tags deliver their merchandise on time. In making its decision, the Board accepted the recommendations of the local Advisory Boards.

The Board accepted a proposal which permits water storage of pots beginning 30 days before the opening of the Dutch Harbor king crab season. Using the season opening of November 10 set during the current meeting, pot storage may begin in the Dutch Harbor area on October 11. No storage will be permitted, however, in Kaleckta or Hot Springs Bays. These bays have been closed to pot storage for a number of years to avoid conflicts with crab nursery areas and potential shrimp fisheries. The original proposal was amended, however, to permit fishermen up to 7 days to remove their pots from the water after closure of the Eastern Aleutian Islands Tanner crab fishery. This change was made to make the regulation consistant with existing Tanner crab regulations in the surrounding areas. ADPS expressed concern that existing penalties for pot storage violations were insufficient to serve as a deterrent and suggested that forfeiture of gear might be a more appropriate penalty.

BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS KING CRAB PROPOSALS SUMMARY

	<u>Board Action</u>
<u>Registration</u>	
(30) Expand the Adak Area to the 800f contour and west to the US-USSR Convention Line	adopted
<u>Seasons</u>	
(25 & 31) Open the Dutch Harbor Area and Adak Area earlier, Sept 15 - Feb 15 vs. Nov 1 - Feb 15	rejected
(26) Open the Dutch Harbor Area later, Nov 10 - Feb 15 vs. Nov 1 - Feb 15	adopted
(32) Open the Adak Area later, Nov 10 vs. Nov 1	adopted
(34) Open the Bristol Bay Area later, Oct 1 vs. Sept 10	adopted
(37) Open and Close the N. Dist., Bering Sea Area later, Sept 15 - Apr 15 vs. Aug 1 - Sept 3	rejected
(38) Change the Opening Dates of the Pribilof Dist. and N. Dist., Bering Sea Area Pribilofs, Oct 1 vs. Sept 10 N. Dist., Aug. 20 vs. Sept 3	amended/adopted
(39) Close Norton Sound to summer king crab fishing	rejected
(40) Change Brown king crab seasons for Pribilofs and N. Dist. Pribilofs, from set by EO to Sept 10 - Apr 15 N. Dist., from no season to Aug 1 - Sept 3	rejected
(41) Establish a season and size limit for Brown king crab in the N. Dist. (5.5 in; May 1-Aug. 1)	amended/adopted
<u>Size Limits</u>	
(27, 33, 35 & 42) Establish a Brown king crab size limit for the Dutch Harbor, Adak, Bristol Bay and Pribilof Dist.	rejected
(189) Reduce the Brown king crab size limit statewide	rejected
<u>Harvest Levels</u>	
(16) Establish a revised harvest strategy for the BS/AI area	adopted
<u>Gear</u>	
(28) Establish a 100 king crab pot limit in the Dutch Harbor Area	rejected
(29) Allow 72 hours to remove gear from the water in the Dutch Harbor Area following a season closure	amended/adopted
(43) Move the N. Dist. pot storage area closer to the St. Matthew fishery	adopted
(45) Allow longlining for Brown king crab in the Dutch Harbor, Adak and Bering Sea areas	amended/adopted

Board Action

Gear (cont.)

- | | | |
|------------|--|---------------------|
| *(58 & 59) | Establish a 100 pot limit for the S. Penn. king and Tanner crab fisheries | rejected |
| *(60) | Provide king and Tanner crab pot storage areas in designated inshore waters within the Dutch Harbor Area | amended/
adopted |
| *(62) | Establish a second king and Tanner pot storage area in Bristol Bay (the old Federal pot storage area) | rejected |

Miscellaneous

- | | | |
|--------|---|---------------------------|
| (36) | Require tank inspections in the N. Dist. of the Bering Sea 116 hours after the opening | rejected |
| (44) | Change closed waters around St. Lawrence, King and Little Diomed Island from 3 to 15 miles | rejected |
| *(57) | In the Kodiak king and Tanner crab fisheries, prohibit the use of catcher/processor vessels | rejected |
| *(196) | Require an enforcement agent on every catcher/processor | Bd to draft
resolution |
| *(63) | Provide extra fishing time to fishermen who assist other fishermen in duties within the BS/AI or Westward Areas | rejected |
| (187) | Allow the longlining of the king crab pots when fishing for Brown king crab - statewide | rejected |
| (188) | Require a permit for processing king crab in all areas | adopted |
| *(194) | Eliminate "major damage" as a reason for allowing post-season recovery of gear and sale of crab. (This provision is not in the plan.) | adopted |
| *(195) | Allow longlining king and Tanner crab pots in waters of 125 f or more, in all areas where there are no pot limits | rejected |

*Proposals for both king and Tanner crab fisheries

BOF = Board of Fisheries