

Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC)

Meeting Minutes and Recommendations

1.30.2024 9-11am AKT

ATTENDEES

Committee Members: Sean Dwyer (Chair), Lance Farr (Vice Chair), Edward Poulsen, Elizabeth Reed, Jake Jacobsen, Dean Fasnacht, Gary Painter, Mark Casto, Jamie Goen (Secretary, non-voting)

(Committee members not in attendance: Brett Reasor, Mike Simpson Steve Minor)

Quorum = greater than or equal to 50% (>=6)

Others in Attendance:

Council staff - Sarah Marrinan, Maria Davis

NOAA Fisheries –Brian Garber-Yonts

ADFG – Kendall Henry

AGENDA

1. Council Red King Crab Savings Area Initial Review
2. Consider smaller size limits for opilio & bairdi
3. Crab Rationalization Program Review Elements (tentative)
4. Other business

MINUTES

1. Council Red King Crab Savings Area Initial Review

Council staff provided an overview of the agenda item for the upcoming Council meeting (C2 BBRKC closures) and changes from the last initial review from June 2023. The next step is for final action, scheduled in June 2024.

Comments that the pot cod rationalization action that is getting started through the Council process in June 2024 might be a better place to provide tools to address bycatch of crab by that fleet.

Acknowledging that the pot cod rationalization program may take years to implement, could consider expanding Alternative 3 with an Option 3 that allows pot cod vessels to fish in Area 512 as long as sign on to a framework agreement to use gear, like specific triggers (some already studied and some being tested now), with minimum bycatch on BBRKC and possibly other requirements like observer coverage and bycatch limits. For pelagic trawl gear, there could be a similar approach where they are closed out of the Red King Crab Savings Area (RKCSA) unless they can prove with enforceable technology they are not on the bottom. Talk of allowing and encouraging industry to work towards reducing bycatch of crab through continued gear modification and how to incentivize that - whether that should be voluntary or regulatory/enforceable.

Comment about concerns over habitat destruction by trawl gear and impacts on crab.

MOTION (Lance/Jake) – PNCIAC recommends allowing the pod cod fleet access to Area 512 with the best available triggers to reduce crab bycatch. WITHDRAWN

Discussion on the motion regarding what “best available” means, whether this motion’s concept is included in other alternatives/options, and noting there is currently no crab PSC limit for pot cod. Looking for something that creates incentives for all sectors to reduce crab mortality and looking for an option that allows pot cod to fish in Area 512 if they’re fishing clean. Recognizing there are alternatives

where both pot cod and pelagic trawl could get closed out of areas, PNCIAC explored options that create incentives to reduce crab mortality and allow gears access to closed areas with specific requirements.

MOTION (Lance/Mark) – PNCIAC recommends the Council include in the range of alternatives for closures agreements or alternatives that allow further development of gear innovations in all sectors to reduce crab bycatch and habitat impacts. For example, allow pot cod in Area 512 if a vessel signs on to an agreement specifying enforceable measures like observer coverage, gear requirements, and limits on bycatch. Another example, close the RKCSA to pelagic trawl gear unless a vessel uses enforceable technology proving the gear is not on the bottom.

PASSED Unanimously

Discussion about trawl industry and bottom contact. Like the direction of this motion but noted there are limitations because bottom contact by pelagic trawl is not enforceable inseason.

Comments that the range of alternatives are missing an element of timing and seasonal protections for molting and mating crab to reduce mortality from fishing gear when they are most susceptible to injury. Other countries like Norway and Canada protect molting and mating crab and the US doesn't.

MOTION (Edward/Lance) – PNCIAC recommends the Council include in the range of alternatives seasonal timing to protect molting and mating crab. PASSED Unanimously

PNCIAC and Council staff discussed the process for getting PNCIAC comments to the Council and Sean/Elizabeth agreed to present PNCIAC's motions under public testimony for this agenda item C2.

2. Consider smaller size limits for opilio & bairdi

PNCIAC was reminded that the size limit discussion is a Board of Fisheries (BOF) matter and that PNCIAC is also advisory to the BOF. The next BOF statewide shellfish meeting is in 2025 with proposals due April 10, 2024.

Noted there is ongoing research regarding snow crab maturity and the need to manage based on the biology of the stock. Comment about allowing more flexibility in the harvest strategy for crab, noting the control rules are antiquated and the stock assessment models are not accurately predicting what they are trying to predict. Comment that increased exploitation rate on mature male biomass and decreased size may increase productivity of the stock and should try a 5% increase in the exploitation rate. Comment that we can learn from what other countries are doing to manage crab.

PNCIAC discussed meeting in late Feb to prepare for any BOF proposals. They would like to invite ADFG staff to discuss potential crab proposals and Scott Goodman from the Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation to speak to research available for crab size limit discussion.

3. Crab Rationalization Program Review Elements (tentative)

The Council discussed the workplan at their October 2023 meeting and the review is scheduled to be completed in June 2024. PNCIAC will discuss this further at a future meeting. In the meantime, comment to think about ideas for program improvements in times of low crab quotas that could benefit both harvesters and processors.

4. Other business

None

ADJOURN 10:26 am AKT