


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC, and AP Members
FROM: Chris Oliver 
Executive Director
DATE: November 25, 2002
SUBJECT: Crab Management

ESTIMATED TIME
6 HOURS
(for all C-1 items)

ACTION REQUIRED

- (c) Provide direction/alternatives on Pribilof blue king crab rebuilding plan.

On September 25, 2002, NMFS informed the Council that the Pribilof Islands blue king crab is overfished according to the criteria in the BSAI King and Tanner Crab FMP (Item C-1(c)(1)). The recent stock assessment showed that the stock was below minimum stock size threshold (MSST) and there were no signs of recovery in the trawl survey data. This fishery has been closed since 1999. The stock has also been protected from trawling effects since 1994 by the Pribilof Islands habitat conservation area.

We are required to prepare and submit a rebuilding plan for this crab stock within one year; i.e., by September 25, 2003. To meet this deadline, a plan will need to be ready for initial review in April, 2002, with final action at the June meeting.

An analytical working group (consisting of NMFS, ADF&G and Council staff) has met to discuss potential alternatives for a rebuilding plan for the Pribilof Islands blue king crab stock. The working group recommends that the following alternatives be considered for analysis:

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Alternative 2: A rebuilding plan which allows some directed harvest of crabs prior to the stock being rebuilt

Alternative 3: A rebuilding plan which allows no directed fishing until the stock is rebuilt

Components of these alternatives may include bycatch considerations, habitat considerations, and implications relative to Crab Rationalization. Each component may also have several options within it.

In addition to preparing a rebuilding plan according to the schedule outlined above, the Plan Team is concurrently examining the adequacy of the existing MSST for this stock. Under the National Standard guidelines, an alternative available to the Council for remedial action is to respecify the MSST if the stock is shown to be declining due to changes in environmental conditions that affect its long-term productivity. If this examination indicates that the stock is in fact declining due to environmental changes, the Council may be presented with a draft FMP amendment to respecify MSST, rather than a rebuilding plan. Plan Team Chair Doug Pengilly (ADF&G) will be on hand to present the recommendations of the working group.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 23, 2002

RECEIVED
SEP 25 2002
N.P.F.M.C

Mr. David Benton, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Mr. Benton:

This letter serves as your official notification under section 304 (e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that Pribilof Islands blue king crab (Paralithodes platypus) is overfished, according to the criteria in the Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crab (FMP). The Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) has determined that the stock has declined below its MSST. This determination is based on a joint NMFS & Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) assessment of stock conditions, which incorporates the 2002 NMFS Eastern Bering Sea trawl survey data. A copy of a memorandum from the Alaska Fisheries Science Center summarizing this finding is attached.

I understand that this is an unusual situation in that we are declaring the stock overfished even though the fishery has been closed since 1999, and even though the stock is protected by existing Council, State of Alaska, and NMFS management measures. The habitat is protected by the Pribilof Islands habitat conservation area. Pribilof Islands blue king crab are not caught as bycatch in any fishery.

According to the national standard guidelines at 50 CFR 600.310(d)(4)(ii) (see attachment), the Council has two alternatives for remedial action. First, under the guidelines, if the stock is declining due to changes in environmental conditions that affect its long-term productivity, the Council must respecify the MSST. Second, if the stock or stock complex is overfished or if a threshold is being approached, the Council must take remedial action by preparing an FMP amendment designed to rebuild the stock to the maximum sustainable yield level within an appropriate time frame.

Section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act states that a council will have one year from notification of the overfished status of a stock to prepare and submit conservation and management



measures to rebuild the affected stock. The rebuilding program must be as short as possible, but must not exceed 10 years, unless the biology of the stock or other environmental conditions dictate otherwise.

Sincerely,



James W. Balsiger,
Administrator, Alaska Region

Attachments:

AFSC memorandum

Excerpts from national standard guidelines at CFR 600.310

Excerpts from the national standard guidelines at CFR 600.310

Environmental Change

(d)(4) Relationship of status determination criteria to environmental change. Some short-term environmental changes can alter the current size of a stock or stock complex without affecting the long-term productive capacity of the stock or stock complex. Other environmental changes affect both the current size of the stock or stock complex and the long-term productive capacity of the stock or stock complex.

(i) If environmental changes cause a stock or stock complex to fall below the minimum stock size threshold without affecting the long-term productive capacity of the stock or stock complex, fishing mortality must be constrained sufficiently to allow rebuilding within an acceptable time frame (also see paragraph (e)(4)(ii) of this section). Status determination criteria need not be respecified.

(ii) If environmental changes affect the long-term productive capacity of the stock or stock complex, one or more components of the status determination criteria must be respecified. Once status determination criteria have been respecified, fishing mortality may or may not have to be reduced, depending on the status of the stock or stock complex with respect to the new criteria.

* * *

(e) Ending overfishing and rebuilding overfished stocks

(2) Notification. The Secretary will immediately notify a Council and request that remedial action be taken whenever the Secretary determines that:

(ii) A stock or stock complex is overfished;

(3) Council action. Within 1 year of such time as the Secretary may identify that overfishing is occurring, that a stock or stock complex is overfished, or that a threshold is being approached, or such time as a Council may be notified of the same under paragraph (e)(2) of this section, the Council must take remedial action by preparing an FMP, FMP amendment, or proposed regulations. This remedial action must be designed to accomplish all of the following purposes that apply:

(ii) If the stock or stock complex is overfished, the purpose of the action is to rebuild the stock or stock complex to the MSY level within an appropriate time frame.

Keith H. Colburn
3117 E Ames Lake Dr. N.E. Redmond WA. 98053

November 20, 2002

Mr. David Benton, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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NOV 22 2002

N.P.F.M.C

Re: C-1, (c.) Crab Rationalization, Pribilof Blue King Crab

Dear Chairman Benton,

The NMFS annual survey has shown a decline in the Pribilof Blue King Crab (PBKC) stocks, though a strong class of Pribilof Red King Crab (PRKC) has continued to show up on the survey. At the latest PNCIAC meeting during the report to industry, the possibility of a directed fishery for PRKC was debated.

Red, and Blue King Crab of the Pribilofs are distinct, and separate stocks of crab with the majority of the PRKC stock lying north, and westward of the Islands, and the PBKC stock lying east, and northeast. In assessing the various possibilities for a rebuilding plan for the PBKC stocks I am hopeful that consideration of managing future directed fisheries in the pribilofs will show the distinct difference in the geographic areas that these individual crab stocks predominately inhabit.

The potential for a future directed pot fishery for PRKC north, and west of the islands would be a benefit to the industry, and local economies, and the separate and distinct nature of these stocks should be addressed.

Sincerely,

Keith H. Colburn
BSAI Crab Fisherman
PNCIAC committee member
crabwizard@cablespeed.com