

Agenda Item: B-2



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
REPORT TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

April 17, 1996

Fisheries managed under delegated authority of the State of Alaska since the last council meeting include crab, salmon and demersal rockfish.

BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS KING AND TANNER CRAB FISHERIES: During March 10-16, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (Board) met to discuss and adopt regulatory changes to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) king and Tanner crab fisheries, and the department's crab observer program. After receiving numerous oral staff reports (see attached), the Board took public testimony from various Fish and Game Advisory Committees, including the Pacific Northwest Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC), crab fishermen, processors, and other crab support industry representatives.

The Board adopted or amended BSAI crab regulations dealing with:

1) **District/registration area boundary changes:** combined the Adak and Dutch Harbor registration areas into one new area called the Aleutian Registration Area. This change allows the department to manage the brown king crab stocks formerly separated at 171° West longitude by the Adak and Dutch Harbor registration lines, as one stock, and allows the brown king crab fleet to fish the entire registration area under one permit card.

2) **Crab seasons:** changed the opening date of the Adak king and Tanner crab fishery from November 1 to September 1 to coincide with their action of combining the Adak and Dutch Harbor registration areas into one new registration area.

3) Closed waters: continued the 10 mile subsistence closed waters regulation around King Island, and the closure east of 163° West longitude to *C. bairdi* Tanner crab fishing if the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery is not opened to commercial fishing.

4) Gear modifications: with the adoption of the new Aleutians brown king crab registration area, adopted regulations requiring brown crab pots be long lined in the area east of 171° West longitude. In addition, four escape rings are required in brown king (5.5 in) and Tanner crab pots (*C. bairdi* 5.0 inch, *C. opilio* 3.75 inch) in the BSAI crab fisheries.

5) Bristol Bay red king crab harvest strategy: establishes a threshold of 8.4 million mature female crabs, and an effective spawning biomass of 14.5 million pounds threshold. The mature male harvest rate is 10% when the population is above threshold and the effective spawning biomass is below 55 million pounds, and 15% when the effective spawning biomass is above 55 million pounds. The maximum harvest rate on legal-sized crabs is 50%.

In an effort to reduce handling of non-target crabs during a Bristol Bay red king crab fishery, the Board asked the department to analysis a size limit reduction from 6.5 to 6 inches and submit an agenda change request during the fall of 1996.

6) Tank check and delivery times: changed tank inspection and delivery requirements for the Bering Sea king and *C. opilio* crab fisheries.

7) Pot storage: addresses vessel safety considerations, increased pot storage around the Pribilof Islands to 35 fathoms 14 days before and after the *C. opilio* season. In addition, additional pot storage to 50 fathoms is allowed in the new Aleutian Island registration area for brown king crab longline gear.

8) Observer Program: allows observers to legally board and observe the catch of vessels delivering to floater processors; allows observers to obtain GPS coordinates of pots being sampled in the Adak and Dutch Harbor fisheries; require proof of Coast Guard vessel safety compliance before an observer is placed onboard a vessel; and requires that each contractor provide a minimum of 65% of their observer deployment days be with certified (experienced) observers. The Board requested the department consider alternatives to the present program and bring the issue back during the 1996/97 meeting cycle.

An industry working group was formed to review the Bering Sea *C. opilio* Tanner crab fishing seasons and bring the issue back to the Board during the 1996/97 meeting cycle. The Board also approved a resolution (see attached) encouraging the Council to take appropriate action to close the Bristol Bay red king crab savings area year-round to non-pelagic trawling and to close all near shore waters of Bristol Bay east of 162° West longitude to all trawling (see attached).

The Bering Sea *C. opilio* Tanner crab season opened on January 15, with a preseason harvest guideline of 55 million pounds. A total of 235 vessels registered, but due to a strike by the fishermen over price, actual fishing by the entire fleet did not occur until January 25. The 1995/96 season closed on February 29 with a total harvest of approximately 65 million pounds valued at over \$86 million, down from the \$180.0 million from the previous season when the fleet harvested 75 million pounds..

SALMON TROLL FISHERY: To date, a total of approximately 7500 Chinook salmon have been landed in the Southeast Alaska winter troll fishery that will close April 14. Catch per landing has generally been lower than the 1989-94 average. Fishing effort during the winter months has been low, likely due to a combination of severe weather, lower than average Chinook abundance, mediocre fish prices, and participation in other fisheries.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA DEMERSAL SHELF ROCKFISH FISHERY: On March 15, all DSR areas closed. A total of 84 vessels landed 272 mt in the Southeast Outside waters with an additional 6 mt taken in the internal state waters. Lingcod is open in some waters outside three miles, and to date 13 vessels have landed 24,000 pounds in the directed fishery and 116,800 pounds have been landed as longline bycatch, primarily from the DSR fishery. Lingcod reopens inside three miles on May 1, and because of federal groundfish moratorium rules and the low salmon prices this year, a large influx of new participants is expected.

**ORAL SHELLFISH STAFF REPORTS
ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES MEETING
ANCHORAGE, MARCH 10 -18, 1996**

1. **Biological Perspectives on Crab Management in Alaska and Crab Nomenclature; by Gordon Kruse, Fisheries Scientist, ADF&G, and Dan Urban, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
2. **Department of Law Report on the Federal Bering Sea-Aleutians Islands King and Tanner Crab Fisheries Management Plan; by Bonnie Harris, Assistant Attorney General, Department of Law.**
3. **The Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fisheries in the Bering Sea Management Area; by Rance Morrison, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G and Douglas Pengilly, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
4. **The Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fisheries in the Aleutian Islands Management Area; by Robert Gish, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
5. **The Commercial King and Tanner Crab Fisheries in Kodiak and the Alaska Peninsula; by David Jackson, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
6. **History of the State of Alaska Onboard Observer Program, 1986-1995; by Michael Ward, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
7. **Vessel Safety Concerns in Bering Sea Commercial Crab Fisheries; by LCD Chris Hones, USCG.**
8. **Overview of Statewide Crab Research; by Gordon Kruse, Fisheries Scientist , ADF&G.**
9. **Overview of Westward Region Bering Sea/Aleutians Crab Research; by Douglas Pengilly, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
10. **An Overview of Handling Mortality; by Gordon Kruse, Fisheries Scientist , ADF&G.**
11. **Review of Incidental Red King Crab Bycatch in the Bering Sea Tanner Crab Fishery Between 1990 and 1995; by Don Tracy, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
12. **Effectiveness of 3-inch High Tunnel Eye Openings in Reducing Capture Rates of Red King Crab in Tanner Crab Fishing Pots; by Don Tracy, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
13. **Overview of the Recommended Harvest Strategy for Red King Crabs in Bristol Bay; by Peggy Murphy, Biometrician, ADF&G.**
14. **Adak Red and Brown King Crab Pot Limits; by Ken Griffin, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**
15. **Review of Norton Sound King Crab Fishery; by Charlie Lean, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G.**

**RESOLUTION TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL REGARDING BOTTOM TRAWL RESTRICTIONS
IN BRISTOL BAY TO PROTECT RED KING CRAB**

This resolution is made this 19th day of March 1996 by the Alaska Board of Fisheries for presentation to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

WHEREAS, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) has delegated the responsibility for conservation and management of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands king and Tanner crab stocks to the State of Alaska under the provisions of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP);

WHEREAS, the most recent scientific information available on stock abundance from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) 1995 survey indicates that mature female king crab abundance in the Bering Sea is below the minimum threshold for allowing a directed fishery, and that overall stock abundance is at its lowest point since the fishery was closed after the stock collapse of 1983;

WHEREAS, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has closed the Bristol Bay (Area T) red king crab fishery for the last two (2) years;

WHEREAS, NPFMC, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board), and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) are formulating a rebuilding plan for king crab stocks of the Bering Sea, and they are reviewing all sources of mortality and effects of life history;

WHEREAS, the board has adopted a new harvest strategy for the red king crab fishery in an effort to rebuild these stocks;

WHEREAS, NPFMC has direct control over the groundfish and scallop fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off the coast of Alaska and the harvest of those fisheries involve on-bottom mobile trawl and dredge gear that take crab as bycatch;

WHEREAS, the board has closed all state waters within the Bristol Bay Area to all trawling;

WHEREAS, the board heard testimony and reviewed technical papers relative to damage to crab stocks and crab habitat from bottom trawl operations, and it is highly probable that bottom trawling damages crab stocks, crab habitat, and living substrata upon which juvenile king crab are dependent for survival;

WHEREAS, one of the objectives of the Bering Sea Groundfish Fisheries Management Plan is minimizing the impact of groundfish fisheries on crab and other prohibited species;

WHEREAS, NPFMC, the board, and the department are all concerned about reducing the impacts of trawling and dredging as an aid to rebuilding king crab stocks;

WHEREAS, these concerns led to the creation of the Crab Protection Zone and the Red King Crab Savings Area, which serve as refuges for crab stocks from effects of trawling;

WHEREAS, the board recognizes that these two protection areas do not adequately protect the necessary crab stocks and habitats;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Board of Fisheries, in its concern to stimulate rebuilding of the Bristol Bay red king crab stocks, does hereby make a priority recommendation to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to take appropriate action in 1996 to:

1. Close the Bristol Bay Red King Crab Savings Area year-round to non-pelagic trawling;
2. Close all nearshore areas east of 162° in the eastern Bristol Bay area to all trawling, which encompasses all known juvenile king crab habitat in Bristol Bay.