

Council Motion
December 9, 2019
EI - Staff Tasking - Crab PSCs

The Council adopts the following purpose and need statement and alternatives for analysis.

Draft Purpose and Need

At present, most Bering Sea crab stocks are experiencing low productivity and small population sizes, leading to large reductions in directed harvest levels. These problems appear to be ongoing and lead the council to examine existing PCS limits to determine whether both directed harvest and bycatch measures are responsive to these adverse conditions.

This action would increase the linkage between controls on crab bycatch in groundfish fisheries and the harvest controls on the directed crab fishery by establishing explicit reductions in allowable bycatch levels when the directed fishery is closed. This action is intended to ensure there is consistency in management measures between directed fisheries and bycatch in groundfish fisheries, making more explicit the balance of impacts to all the fisheries and communities that are affected by the status of depressed stocks.

Draft Alternatives

Alternative 1: No action

Alternative 2: Reduced PSC limits for BSAI trawl CDQ and non-CDQ groundfish fishing when the corresponding directed crab fishery is closed.

When no Crab Rationalization Program individual fishing quota (IFQ) is issued in a season for BBRKC, bairdi, or opilio, set the crab PSC limit for that stock at the lowest abundance-based level. As described in regulation at 50 CFR 679.21(e)(1), the PSC limits for the groundfish fisheries would be as follows under this alternative when the directed crab fishery is closed:

- Bairdi Zone 1- 0.5% of total abundance minus 20,000 animals
- Bairdi Zone 2 – 1.2% of the total abundance minus 30,000 animals
- BBRKC Zone 1-32,000 red king crab
- Opilio -4.350 million animals

The Council requests that the analysis include source numbers for the crab abundance estimates used to calculate the PSCs and clearly state whether they are from raw numbers from the NMFS bottom trawl survey or from stock assessment model estimates