

PROGRESS REPORT

Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force Recommendations

Prepared by Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council
Fall 2023

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: The State of Alaska should support taking incremental measures through the regulatory process to improve bycatch utilization with a particular focus on species that are otherwise marketable but are caught with non-targeted gear, or discards in a directed fishery that are required by regulation.

Progress:

1. *The Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC) has established a working group to investigate the logistical, regulatory, economic, and political issues that would need to be addressed. An emphasis will be on high value species. Reports will be provided to the BAC in 2024.*
2. *The North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a motion at the October 2023 meeting to support a discussion paper by National Marine Fisheries Service concerning management of the maximum retainable amount regulations. The approved motion is shown below:*

[E Council Motion MRA October 2023 \(npfmc.org\)](https://www.npfmc.org/E-Council-Motion-MRA-October-2023)

Gulf of Alaska Fixed Gear

Recommendation: Following gear modification research, consider regulations for the directed crab fishery and pot cod fishery to reduce incidental take and discard mortality.

Progress: *While industry continues to experiment with various gear modifications to reduce incidental take and discard mortality, no regulations have been recommended.*

Recommendation: Address the lack of monitoring in the directed Tanner crab and state waters pot cod fisheries.

Progress: *The State of Alaska will be introducing legislation to the Alaska State Legislature in 2024 to allow for the use of electronic monitoring on vessels fishing in state managed fisheries.*

Gulf of Alaska Trawl Gear

Recommendation: Review the open and closed areas in the Gulf of Alaska for pelagic and non-pelagic trawl gear and consider closing new/additional areas to reduce the bycatch of halibut, salmon and Tanner crab.

Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) initiated a discussion paper to review protective action for Tanner crab in the Kodiak area. This is scheduled for review at the December 2023 NPFMC meeting.

Recommendation: To better quantify removals of prohibited species, it is recommended that trawl catcher vessels in the Gulf of Alaska be required to have 100% observer coverage when engaged in non-pelagic trawling. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work to obtain funding, either through specific appropriations and/or grants for the additional coverage.

Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council initiated a discussion paper to require full monitoring in two statistical areas around Kodiak Island for both trawl and pot gear.

Recommendation: It is recommended that a regulatory requirement be approved for the Gulf of Alaska pelagic trawl fleet, including any tenders of pelagic trawl caught fish, to have 100% electronic monitoring. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work with National Marine Fisheries Service, our federal delegation, and others to work to acquire funding to install electronic monitoring equipment on all GOA catchers and tenders.

Progress: This recommendation has been partially addressed. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council took final action to implement a trawl electronic monitoring program for the pelagic trawl fisheries in both the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. There is federal funding for the partial coverage stratum to buy systems and install them on catch vessels for all gear types.

Recommendation: It is recommended the State of Alaska propose that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council consider development of an abundance-based management program for halibut bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska as a way to address bycatch during fluctuations of halibut biomass.

Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State of Alaska investigate the value of requiring full retention of Tanner crab in all GOA trawl fisheries for a period of time to adequately assess removals.

Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.

Recommendation: As a means of reducing and managing bycatch and associated mortality of high value species within the Gulf of Alaska, it is recommended that rationalization-type management tools be considered.

Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.

Bering Sea Fixed Gear

Recommendation: Evaluate possible seasonal closures in hot spot areas for pot gear both inside and outside of state managed waters.

Progress: NPFMC initiated an analysis to consider closures of the red king crab savings area for federally managed pot gear. This is scheduled for Initial Review at the February 2024 NPFMC meeting.

Recommendation: Consider a rationalization program for the 60' and greater pot cod vessels as a way to manage bycatch and examine prohibited species caps as part of a rationalization program.

Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering a cooperative type of rationalization program for this fleet. A discussion paper is scheduled for the June 2024 meeting.

Recommendation: Evaluate the observer coverage and monitoring for the directed crab and pot cod fisheries.

Progress: The State of Alaska will be introducing legislation to the Alaska State Legislature in 2024 to allow for the use of electronic monitoring on vessels fishing in state managed fisheries.

Recommendation: Examine the impact of retaining all legal crab in the directed crab fishery and counting toward IFQ.

Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.

Bering Sea Trawl Gear

Recommendation: Establish a scientific-based chum salmon cap to reduce bycatch in the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea.

Progress:

1. *The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) initiated an analysis on development of a chum cap at the April 2023 meeting.*
2. *In October 2023 the NPFMC reviewed a preliminary analysis and refined alternatives for review. Links are shown below with the Council motion and a press release regarding the action. A first review of the impact analysis will be in mid-2024 with final action scheduled for December 2024.*

[C4 Chum Salmon Bycatch Council Motion October 2023 \(npfmc.org\)](#)

[NPFMC Chum Salmon Press Release October 2023](#)

Recommendation: Review effectiveness of fixed open and closed areas for trawling and continue to examine methods to develop flexible spatial management.

Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering action to close the red king crab savings area to all groundfish gear. Initial Review for this issue is scheduled for the February 2024 NPFMC meeting.

Recommendation: The State should work to achieve real time genetic reporting that provides the composition of Western Alaska salmon in the bycatch. This can then be used in management of the pollock fishery to avoid areas and times when Western Alaska salmon are on the grounds in the Bering Sea.

Progress: Industry research continues to work on the development of real time genetic reporting.

Recommendation: A review is recommended for the Bering Sea trawl area prohibited species caps (PSC) in relation to crab to be supported by the State of Alaska. This review would examine the impacts to the resource and trawl sector if trawl crab PSC were to be applied across the entire Bering Sea area, instead of only the current sub-areas.

Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.