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# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

### NEWS RELEASE



*Sam Cotten, Commissioner*  
*Jeff Regnart, Director*



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#### **SOUTHEAST ALASKA RED AND BLUE KING CRAB COMMERCIAL FISHERY CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Petersburg. . . The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) announced today that the Southeast Alaska (Registration Area A) commercial red king crab fishery will not open during the 2015/2016 fishing season.

The Southeast Alaska Red King Crab Management Plan [5 AAC 34.113] directs the department to manage the Southeast Alaska red king crab fishery in accordance with the Alaska Board of Fisheries' "Policy on King and Tanner Crab Resource Management". The department shall close the fishery if the department's estimate of available harvest is below the minimum threshold of 200,000 pounds of legal male red king crab. The estimate of available harvest, based on 2015 stock assessment survey results, is well below the minimum threshold.

Regionally, the biomass estimate did increase from last season, but is still at historically low levels. Of the seven survey areas, five had increases in legal biomass and four had increases in mature biomass, while the others decreased or remained constant since last season. The biomass estimates for legal and mature RKC for the Southeast Region are 1.23 million pounds and 1.59 million pounds respectively for the 2015/2016 season. These adjusted biomass estimates amount to a 15% increase in the mature male biomass and a 62% increase in legal biomass. These legal and mature biomass estimates have also been adjusted to incorporate mark/recapture assessments for six areas in total. Regional biomass is estimated from seven survey areas and extrapolated to the entire region.

#### Survey and Analysis

Areas surveyed include Pybus Bay, Gambier Bay, Seymour Canal, Peril Strait, the Juneau area, Lynn Sisters, and Excursion Inlet. Port Frederick and Holkham Bay were dropped as survey areas in 2015 due to budget constraints. The estimate of available harvest was determined through a catch-survey analysis (CSA) for all surveyed bays. The CSA incorporates department stock assessment survey data from 2015 and prior years, commercial harvest in 2011 and prior years, and port sampling data obtained during landings of commercial harvest. Biomass estimates produced for each survey area were adjusted based on mark/recapture assessments in six of the seven surveyed areas. Harvest data indicate that an average of 53.1% of historical harvest has been taken from surveyed areas and 46.9% of historical harvest has been taken from non-surveyed areas. This surveyed/non-surveyed area ratio was used to calculate legal and mature biomass estimates for the non-surveyed areas. Harvest rates appropriate to stock health ratings, catch per unit effort (CPUE) of all size/sex classes compared to long-term and short-term averages, and biomass estimates were applied to each surveyed area. Stock health ratings of poor and below average in six of the seven survey areas, all male sex/size classes in all seven survey areas below long-term averages, SE RKC Comm. Fishery

and generally low biomass estimates identified in each survey area through the CSA, offered no harvestable surplus towards the minimum threshold in regulation.

The 2014 stock assessment survey employed a re-stratified sample design. Re-stratification of all survey areas was initiated in 2005 to reduce variance in estimates of population size. This was accomplished by adjusting sampling intensity within substrata to correspond with variation in survey catch along with other factors such as bathymetry and input on crab distribution from the commercial fleet. Re-stratification has resulted in reductions in variance around survey catch per unit effort and population estimates and a reduction in the number of survey pots with a catch of zero crab.

#### North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) Red King Crab Project

In 2009, the department initiated a collaborative study with the commercial crab industry to ground truth department pot survey-based biomass estimates using mark/recapture techniques surveying the Lynn Sisters area. The department received both NPRB funding and a legislative increment to support this effort. Pybus Bay, Gambier Bay, and Excursion Inlet were surveyed in 2010, and Seymour Canal, Peril Strait, and Port Frederick were completed in 2011. Holkham Bay was completed in 2012. A second mark/recapture was completed in Pybus Bay in 2014. Though all areas originally slated for mark/recapture work have been completed, new mark/recapture estimates need to be completed in all areas to provide additional data to use in assessing regional red king crab abundance. Fishermen are advised that as budgets allow, the department will continue to work collaboratively with industry to repeat mark/recapture experiments in survey areas and continue improvements to red king crab stock assessment in Southeast Alaska.

Additional information may be found in regulation 5 AAC 34.113. SOUTHEAST ALASKA RED KING CRAB MANAGEMENT PLAN on page 13 of the 2015-2017 King and Tanner Crab Commercial Fishing Regulations booklet available in area offices, or online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.commercial>

The Emergency Order corresponding with this announcement is EO 1C1515.

News releases web site: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>.

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