

PROPOSAL 1: 5 AAC 34.9XX. PRIBILOF DISTRICT BLUE KING CRAB HARVEST STRATEGY, page 1

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal would establish a regulatory harvest strategy to facilitate rebuilding of the Pribilof District blue king crab stock. The department has analyzed three general harvest strategy alternatives; status quo, allowing fishing prior to rebuilding and no harvest prior to rebuilding. The department has prepared a written report that provides details and analysis for these rebuilding alternatives. The proposed harvest strategies have four components: 1) stock threshold for opening the fishery; 2) harvest rate applied to mature males; 3) maximum harvest of legal males; 4) minimum fishery guideline harvest level.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The existing harvest strategy, although approved by the Board of Fisheries in 1990, is non-regulatory. The current harvest strategy contains a stock threshold (770,000 mature males), harvest rate on mature males (20%), and harvest cap on legal males (60%), however it does not have a minimum GHL for opening the fishery.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? A new regulatory harvest strategy would be adopted into regulation that is more conservative than the existing strategy in order to allow rebuilding of the stock.

BACKGROUND: The Pribilof District blue king crab stock has been in decline since 1995 and the fishery has been closed since 1999. In September 2002, the Secretary of Commerce declared this stock overfished. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, a rebuilding plan for this stock must be adopted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) within one year of the overfished declaration. A revised harvest strategy that promotes rebuilding is key to the Pribilof blue king crab stock. This proposal is a Category 2 (guideline harvest levels) management measure in the FMP.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: This is a staff proposal. Staff recommends adoption of option 3B. Option 3B establishes a fishery threshold at maximum sustained yield which is currently 13.2 million pounds of mature male and female blue king crab. When the stock reaches that level a 10 percent harvest rate is applied to the mature male biomass. The harvest of legal males is capped at 20 percent and the minimum guideline for a fishery opening is 0.5 million pounds.

The NPFMC, at their June 2003 meeting, suggested a preliminary preferred alternative, option 2D. The Council's Crab Plan Team, at their September 2003 meeting, is recommending option 3B as the preferred option in the rebuilding plan. The department's preferred option 3B is more conservative than 2D. The Pribilof blue king crab stock assessment typically has very large confidence bounds around the point estimate for total mature biomass, causing uncertainty in the point estimate. This low reliability in the point estimate indicates that the rebuilding harvest strategy needs to be conservative. In addition, under crab rationalization fishermen will be issued an individual fishing quota which will be based on a total allowable catch (TAC). Under the competitive fishery that currently exists, the state can close the Pribilof blue king crab fishery prior to the attainment of the guideline harvest level if fishery performance is poor. Under rationalization this option to close the fishery is lost. Therefore, the department believes that the

harvest strategy must be conservative to guard against survey error. Option three also opens the fishery at levels similar to those experienced immediately preceding the recent stock decline.

COST ANALYSIS: Adoption of this proposal would not result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate.