

Alaska Board of Fisheries Committee Summary

COMMITTEE A

Gulf of Alaska Crab

March 18, 2014

Board Committee Members:

1. Fritz Johnson, *Chair
2. Orville Huntington
3. Tom Kluberton

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Staff Members:

1. Forrest Bowers, Deputy Director, CFD
2. Tracy Lingnau, Regional Supervisor, CFD
3. Tim Baker, Regional Management Coordinator, CFD
4. Mark Stichert, Regional Management Coordinator, CFD
5. Jan Rumble, Area Management Biologist, CFD
6. Ken Goldman, Area Research Biologist, CFD
7. Maria Wessel, Asst. Area Management Biologist, CFD
8. Melissa Good, Asst. Area Management Biologist, CFD
9. Tom Brookover, Deputy Director, SFD
10. Jim Hasbrouck, Regional Supervisor, SFD
11. Tom Vania, Regional Management Coordinator, SFD
12. Matt Miller, Regional Management Coordinator, SFD
13. Carol Kerkvliet, Area Management Biologist, SFD
14. Davin Holen, Regional Management Coordinator, Subsistence

Alaska Wildlife Troopers

1. Steve Hall

Alaska Department of Law:

1. Mike Mitchell

Advisory Committee Members:

1. Tom Hagberg-Homer AC
2. Don Fox- Kodiak AC
3. John Renner- PWS/Copper River AC

Public Panel Members:

1. Robert Smith- PWS
2. Warren Chappel- PWS
3. Joe Hanes- Soldotna

Federal Subsistence Representative:

1. George Pappas- FWS

The committee met on March 17, 2014 at 5:00 p.m. and adjourned at 5:30 p.m. The committee reconvened on March 18, 2014 at 8:00 a.m. and adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

PROPOSALS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE WERE: (19 total) 326–343 and 347.

PROPOSAL 326 – 5 AAC 34.XXX. Closed waters and 5 AAC 35.XXX. Closed waters. Close all commercial king and Tanner crab fisheries in the state, except Southeastern Alaska. *(The finfish aspects of this proposal were considered at the Lower and Upper Cook Inlet Finfish meetings.)*

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: None.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.

PROPOSAL 327 – 5 AAC 34.200. Description of Registration Area E. Update regulatory description of king crab Registration Area E.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: None.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 328 – 5 AAC 35.300. Description of Registration Area E and 5 AAC 35.305. Description of Registration Area E districts. Update regulatory description of Tanner crab Registration Area E.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: None.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 329 – 5 AAC 35.31X. Guideline harvest range. Establish a guideline harvest range (GHR) for Tanner crab in Prince William Sound based on commercial fishery opened with 10-pot limit.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Do not have the resources to survey entire area - could open up too soon and may overharvest; want to be cautious and move slowly.
- There are ancillary stations outside of the trawl survey area where the historical fishery occurred and very few Tanner crab have been found.
- It is too soon to have a fishery with the current information, we have one year of high recruits and prerecruits.
- Fishery dependent data from the pot fishery is useful, but we cannot expand from pot data to area wide abundance like we can with the area swept survey. No viable way to expand pot data to abundance. A pot survey is most useful when there is also a commercial fishery so that the CPUE can be compared.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- PWS is a large area, and surveys don't cover the area well. Residents believe Tanner crab are coming back and would like to get a mechanism in place to develop a fishery. This would require a harvest strategy according to the regulations. They would like to see this strategy developed for the current biomass estimates based on the current survey.
- Carapace measurement size increased for the subsistence fishery to 5.5 inches and would like it to remain at 5.3 inches for commercial fishery.
- It would be good if PWS was surveyed yearly.
- There were more crab caught on longlines for Pacific cod in the 1990's than the department caught in their surveys.
- Department could utilize the fleet with a 5 pot limited survey.
- The last fishery occurred in 1988 and encompassed all of PWS and but the trawl survey only covers part of PWS.
- Tanner crab caught in the current subsistence fishery seem very healthy. This is different than the crab caught in the last years of the commercial fishery when the crab had a black color and were skip molts.
- There could be an abundance in the area that is not seen in the survey.
- Where we fished in the late 1970s and 1980s, a majority of the fishery was prosecuted in the entrance to PWS that is not surveyed – it's too deep to trawl there.
- In 1999, when the harvest strategy was removed from the regulations, this resulted in not having a mechanism to have a commercial fishery.

- Department has the mechanism to limit pots now, but the harvest strategy is the key component missing.
- Commissioner's permit could be used to prosecute a commercial fishery and also provide abundance information.
- Using data collected from commercial fisheries is not as good as fishery independent scientific information.
- Three years is too long to wait for a harvest strategy and they would like to see the mechanism in place now.
- If shrimp abundance developed from the pot survey, why can't crab abundance be developed from a pot survey. There was a pot survey in the 1970's when the commercial fishery was happening.
- An idea would be to break PWS into small districts and small quotas.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus on proposals 329, 330, 331, 332, and 333.

PROPOSAL 330 – 5 AAC 35.31X. Guideline harvest range. Establish a guideline harvest range (GHR) for Tanner crab in Prince William Sound based on commercial fishery opened with 15-pot limit.

Comment Summary:

Department: See proposal 329

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: See proposal 329

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus on proposals 329, 330, 331, 332, and 333.

PROPOSAL 331 – 5 AAC 35.31X. Guideline harvest range. Establish a guideline harvest range (GHR) for Tanner crab in Prince William Sound based on commercial fishery opened with 20-pot limit.

Comment Summary:

Department: See proposal 329.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: See proposal 329.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus on proposals 329, 330, 331, 332, and 333.

PROPOSAL 332 – 5 AAC 35.310. Fishing seasons for Registration Area E. Open a commercial Tanner crab fishery in Prince William Sound for intervals no greater than two years.

Comment Summary:

Department: See proposal 329.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Author of proposals 329 to 332 feels the strongest about proposal 332 because there has to be a mechanism for the fleet to get a better estimate of abundance and do it in a more timely manner than once a generation.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus on proposals 329, 330, 331, 332, and 333.

PROPOSAL 333 – 5 AAC 35.310. Fishing seasons for Registration Area E. Open a commercial Tanner crab fishery in Prince William Sound in March and April with vessel length and pot limit.

Comment Summary:

Department: See proposal 329.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- 53 feet seems like an odd length to limit boat length to.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus on proposals 329, 330, 331, 332, and 333.

PROPOSAL 334 – 5 AAC 35.408. Registration Area H Tanner crab harvest strategy.
Modify the harvest strategy for Registration Area H Tanner crab.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- We are not doing a pot survey to estimate abundance, the pot survey that we are doing is to capture crab for our shell hardness study.
- A 3-year average tracks the Kachemak Bay Tanner crab population better than the 5-year average.
- Some other fisheries use just the current year estimate, don't use the average.
- Using the 3-year average may open the fishery quicker and may close it quicker also.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Adamantly opposed to the trawl survey.
- There were questions about the current abundance information, when is the soonest that we could have a fishery, and how would changing this regulation affect that?
- We are more likely to have a fishery if there is a recovery using this average because it will track abundance better.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 335 – 5 AAC 35.410. Fishing seasons for Registration Area H; 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area; 5 AAC 77.516. Personal use Tanner crab fishery. Change season dates of the fisheries to October 15 through March 31.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None

Public Panel Comments:

- In Kachemak Bay in July, there are soft-shell crab which are not in prime condition for commercial markets. The Homer area is too crowded on July 15 for the fishery, it's dangerous and enforcement isn't available because of other responsibilities. Don't know why fishery opens July 15?
- Noncommercial fisherman can still get out on the water in the winter and spring.
- Summer is the wrong time to be catching Tanner crab, they will be better quality in the winter.
- Anyone that cares about the resource doesn't want to fish in July. Alternative season dates might be August 15 to November 15 and January 15 to March 15 because the harbor ices up in the deep of winter occasionally for a month and a half which can lead to lost pots. Also, cold weather has negative effects on crab, legs pop off crab on deck if its below 20 degrees. Will submit alternative language to support a 5 month season with different months.
- The fishing areas for Tanner crab are 30 minutes from the boat harbor in Homer.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support moving the date back from July 15. No consensus on an October 15 start date.

PROPOSAL 336 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area. Modify sport fishing season, pot size requirements, pot limit, and bag limit for Cook Inlet Tanner crab.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Survey 39 stations at ½ nautical mile tows.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- The trawl survey captures very small sample size to extrapolate abundance; last year only about 62 legal male crab were caught and this was extrapolated to 20,000 crab.
- The year the survey data closed the fishery in September, the trawl survey was done in June and 50% of the harvest happens in July and August, before the fishery was closed. Fishery performance in July and August was excellent, and this doesn't mesh with what the trawl revealed. Variability in trawl survey is too high. We can get 200 crab in a single pot.
- Would like a resident only fishery; a small conservative fishery.
- It's a shame to take away people's access to a public resource with such limited data.
- Where is all this recruitment going if we don't see legal males a couple years down the road? It's not about abundance but about sustainability. We're not like a big commercial fishery; we could have a small pot limit. Put a cap on it and find out if it is sustainable. We can't find out information without a fishery.
- Homer AC believes proposal 335 has more merit.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 337 – 5 AAC 02.425. Subsistence Tanner crab fishery. Repeal prohibition on subsistence Tanner crab fishing 14 days before participating in a king and Tanner crab commercial opening.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- The Kodiak District for commercial Tanner crab consists of six separate management sections, generally only two or three sections open when commercial Tanner crab fisheries occur. The section around Kodiak City has not opened for a commercial Tanner crab fishery for several years.
- Have no concerns with amended language from the Kodiak AC.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative:

- Oppose (in an RC).
- Doesn't think the communities would object to amended language, but has no data on it
- May be pockets of crab near subsistence communities that would be negatively affected by commercial fishing.

Public Panel Comments:

- Oppose the proposal because people cheat and prospect before the commercial fishery opens.
- If a section isn't open for commercial season, there is no reason to not open it to subsistence. This could be controlled well.
- Amended language to be submitted in an RC.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 338 – 5 AAC 02.420. Subsistence king crab fishery; 5 AAC 02.425. Subsistence Tanner crab fishery; 5 AAC 34.43X. Closed waters in Registration Area K; and 5 AAC 35.535. Closed waters in Registration Area J. Close Alitak Bay to subsistence and commercial king and Tanner crab fishing.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Proposed closure area supports a commercial Tanner crab fishery and subsistence king and Tanner crab fisheries.
- Over fifty percent of all subsistence king crab are taken in the proposed closure area.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- There is no biological or conservation reason to close Alitak Bay to crab fishing.
- Only state-waters would be closed, about fifty percent of the crab stocks in this area are outside of state-waters.
- In Kodiak at least two sections must open to have a fishery and this section is usually one of them.
- Proposal would reduce the chances of having a commercial Tanner crab fishery in the entire Kodiak District.
- Semidi Island Overlap section is located between the Kodiak and Chignik management districts and opens if either Alitak Bay (Southwest Section) or the Chignik District commercial Tanner crab fisheries open. This proposal would reduce the chances of the Semidi Island Overlap Section from opening.
- Crab stocks are rebounding, there is no reason to close this area.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus, limited discussion from committee.

PROPOSAL 339 – 5 AAC 34.400. Description of Registration Area K and 5 AAC 34.405. Description of Registration Area K districts. Amend description of area and districts.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Doesn't change the lines significantly.
- There hasn't been a commercial king crab fishery since the 1980s.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 340 – 5 AAC 35.510. Fishing seasons for Registration Area J. Clarify weather-delay regulations to open the Tanner crab seasons in the Kodiak and South Peninsula.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- There was a huge problem in Chignik last year and this will fix that. When it did open last year it was 35 knots and freezing spray.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 341 – 5 AAC 35.506. Area J registration and 5 AAC 35.555. Inspection requirements for Registration Area J. Repeal Tanner crab tank inspection requirements.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Department unable to send staff to all of the Kodiak, Chignik, and Alaska Peninsula fishing ports for tank inspections prior to the season opening.
- Currently, some portions of the fleet will receive tank inspections while the tank inspection requirement is waived for other portions of the same fleet so the regulation is not being applied consistently.
- Some vessels have the ability to fax directly from the vessel. If these vessels are not required to be in port for a tank inspection they could fax their final registration from the fishing grounds potentially giving them an advantage.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Kodiak crab fleet was happy to see this proposal, but would like be able to validate their registration 26 hours before the scheduled season opening rather than the current 24 hour registration requirement. Two more hours would allow vessels more time to safely travel to the fishing grounds. Amended language to be submitted in an RC.
- Chignik doesn't need the extra 2 hours.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 342 – 5 AAC 35.510. Fishing seasons for Registration Area J. Change Tanner crab fishery opening to January 3.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Small boats would like to keep the January 15 start date.
- Many small boats do not have a federal cod LLP and cannot fish for cod in January.
- Boats that register for Tanner crab cannot fish for cod with pot gear for the two weeks before the January 15 crab opening.
- Larger boats want to maximize access to cod and crab fisheries and may support a January 3rd start date, but most of those boats are currently fishing for cod and aren't here to speak to the proposal.
- Federal Pacific cod seasons open January 1 and processors sometimes have difficulty getting workers in due to weather and flight availability. If crab are delivered earlier in the year processors may not have the capacity to process the catch.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 343 – 5 AAC 34.500. Description of Registration Area M and 5 AAC 34.505. Description of Registration Area M districts. Amend description of king crab registration area and districts.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: None.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 347 – 5 AAC 35.500. Description of Registration Area J and 5 AAC 35.505. Description of Registration Area J districts. Amend description of registration area and districts.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- The only significant change occurs on the eastern boundary line. No effort occurs in that area. Change would align the Westward and Central regions crab boundary lines.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Modern GPS units are accurate to three digits, boundary regulations should go to three digits for better accuracy.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.