

PROPOSAL 257 - 5 AAC 35.510. Fishing seasons for Registration Area J. Extend the Bering Sea District eastern boundary for retention of *C. opilio* crab from 166° W. long. to 165° W. long., as follows:

5 AAC 35.510(f)(2) should be amended to read: “in waters west of **165° W. long.**, [166° W. LONG.] male *C. opilio* Tanner crab may be taken from...”

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Over the past several commercial fishing seasons for *C. bairdi* Tanner crab, vessels targeting eastern *C. bairdi* crab (EBT) between 166° W long. and 163° W long. have been encountering increasing amounts of clean, legal-size male *C. opilio* during the course of their normal fishing operations. Unfortunately, because the eastern boundary limit for retention of *C. opilio* is at 166° W. long., these vessels are forced to discard all *C. opilio* crab.

There is a healthy population of *C. opilio* beyond the current eastern boundary. Requiring vessels to discard *C. opilio* crab forces unnecessary and wasteful mortality to the population of *C. opilio* as a whole. Mortality data from both directed catch and discard amounts are incorporated into annual stock assessments and can negatively impact population estimates and future population projections.

If the current eastern boundary for *C. opilio* crab is retained, regulatory discards and associated mortality will continue. Forced discards of legal male *C. opilio* crab are an unnecessary source of mortality that should be minimized and avoided to the greatest extent practicable. One of the many benefits outlined and achieved with implementation of the Crab Rationalization program was improved resource conservation, which should be a continuing focus and goal as commercial crab regulations are refined.

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