

PROPOSAL 258 - 5 AAC 35.506. Area J registration. Extend the Bering Sea District eastern boundary for retention of *C. bairdi* crab from 163° W. long. to 162° W. long., as follows:

5 AAC 35.506(i)(3) should be amended to read: “in a directed *C. bairdi* Tanner crab fishery occurring between **162° W. long.** [163° W. LONG.] and 166° W. long.;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Over the past several commercial fishing seasons, vessels targeting Bristol Bay red king crab have been encountering increasing amounts of clean, legal-size male *C. bairdi* crab as this population continues to grow and increase to healthy, sustainable levels. Unfortunately, because the eastern boundary limit for retention of eastern *C. bairdi* Tanner crab is at 163° W. long., these vessels are unable to retain any *C. bairdi* crab eastward of 163 W. long, including any *C. bairdi* harvested incidentally during directed red king crab operations.

Overlapping populations of both Bristol Bay red king crab and eastern *C. bairdi* are stable. Regulations that require or incentivize vessels to discard legal male *C. bairdi* crab forces unnecessary and wasteful mortality to the population of *C. bairdi* 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. bairdi* crab is retained, discards and associated mortality will likely continue, especially as the *C. bairdi* population continues to grow. Any discards of legal male *C. bairdi* 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. Further, adjusting the boundary eastward by one degree of latitude will not negatively impact sensitive life stages or time periods of Bristol Bay red king crab because: 1) bycatch of female and juvenile red king crab will be allowed to escape as the size of the escapement rings and mesh used for bairdi and 2) the season closure of eastern bairdi would be remain March 31 to protect sensitive life periods.

PROPOSED BY: Peter Liske

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