



Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska Crab Committee Tuesday May 31, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Committee members: Linda Kozak (Chair), Erik Velsko, Stephanie Madsen, Kevin Delaney

1. Call to order
Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska crab committee meeting called to order at 9 AM by Chair Linda Kozak
2. Roll call: introduction of committee and ABRT members
Committee members present: Linda Kozak (Chair), Stephanie Madsen, Erik Velsko. Other ABRT members were John Jensen and Raymond May

ADF&G personnel present: Karla Bush, David Loomis.

Others in attendance included Theresa Peterson, Alexis Kwachka, Rebecca Skinner, S Ricci, Paul Matyas, Chris Woodley, Darren Platt, Cory Lescher, Jon Kurland, Ernie Weiss, Paddy O'Donnell, Pat Shanahan, Paul Wilkins, Mary Furuness, Jennifer Mondragon
3. Approve agenda: May 31, 2022 modified agenda to discuss future meeting dates and information requests for Bering Sea crab after public comment. Motion to approve by Stephanie Madsen and seconded by Erik Velsko. Motion carried.
4. Minutes April 26, 2022, Motion to approve by Stephanie Madsen and seconded by Erik Velsko. Motion carried.
5. Old business: No old business
6. New business: Gulf of Alaska Tanner Crab Information
 - i. Presentation on Tanner crab bycatch in the GOA groundfish fisheries and bycatch mitigation measures in place.
 - ii. Catch of groundfish by non-pelagic trawl and fixed gear in the Central Gulf with high Tanner crab abundance.
 - iii. Economic value information for Tanner crab and groundfish fisheries that overlap.

Karla Bush (ADF&G) reviewed information on Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA) groundfish catch and Tanner crab bycatch by gear sector for the entire management area and in ADF&G statistical areas 525702 and 525630 on the southeast side of Kodiak. Since 2006, the proportion of groundfish catch occurring in these two statistical areas has ranged from 14% to 27% for non-pelagic trawl gear, 0 to 31% for pot gear, 2% to 38% for pelagic trawl gear, and 0 to 7% for hook-and-line gear. Most Tanner crab bycatch in the groundfish fisheries occurs in fisheries using non-pelagic trawl and pot gear. The proportion of Tanner crab bycatch that occurs in these two statistical areas has ranged from 19% to 68% for non-pelagic trawl gear and from 0 to 25% for pot gear.

Recent actions taken on Tanner crab include Amendment 89 to the GOA Groundfish Fishery Management Plan which was implemented in 2014 and created the Outer Marmot Bay Tanner crab protection area which is closed to all trawling except directed fishing for pollock. Amendment 89 also required the use of trawl sweeps when directed fishing for flatfish in the CGOA. In June 2017 the Council reviewed a discussion paper on CGOA crab protection measures and asked for an expanded paper to review catch of flatfish in non-pelagic trawl fisheries and Pacific cod in pot fisheries in statistical areas 525630 & 525702 and the Chiniak Gully as well as observer coverage rates in these areas. The Council reviewed the expanded paper in June 2018 and recommended no further action.

Following each presentation, the chair provided opportunity for Task Force members and the public to ask clarifying questions. Questions included:

- a) A request for information on what the directed Tanner crab harvesters are doing to reduce bycatch. A response was that they are working on a variety of things, including web size, changing regulations on escape ring requirements, implementing best handling practices, and working to avoid temperature sensitivity if possible.
- b) A question was asked regarding the lack of observers in the directed Tanner crab fishery and if they should be required to take observers. A response was that most are very small boat harvesters and requiring an observer would be problematic. The daily fishery scheduled would also make this challenging.

7. Recommendations from fixed gear and trawl gear sector representatives for research priorities and proposed additional bycatch management measures for Gulf of Alaska Tanner crab.

Trawl: Rebecca Skinner and Chris Woodley presented information on trawl catcher vessels (CV) and catcher processors (CP), an economic overview of fishery landings in Kodiak by species, existing time/area closures, and recommendations for additional information or research. The presentation is attached to the meeting information.

- a) Existing closed areas in the GOA for trawl should be evaluated, including closures for Steller Sea Lion protection as well as year-round and seasonal non-pelagic trawl closures to protect red king crab and Tanner crab; and a prohibition on non-pelagic trawl fishing in most state-waters.
- b) Recommendations for the pot fleet were to create tools to better understand the bycatch in the state pot cod fishery and discards in the directed Tanner crab fishery, as well as implementing an observer coverage program to better quantify removals.
- c) Data gaps include an incomplete understanding of all Tanner crab removals and need for information to estimate total removals in the directed Tanner fishery and state-water Pacific cod fisheries.
- d) Additional research was recommended on trawl discard mortality for Tanner crab, unobserved mortality for pelagic trawl gear and modified trawl sweep gear.
- e) Research on closed areas is needed to assess whether these area closures promote abundance of fish which predate on Tanner crab (e.g. Pacific cod, arrowtooth flounder, pollock).

Fixed Gear: Theresa Peterson provided recommendations from the fixed gear fleet which are included in the meeting information tabs. Those recommendations included:

- a) Requiring full retention of Tanner crab in all GOA trawl fisheries for a period of two years.
- b) Using electronic monitoring (EM) for compliance and requiring 100% observer coverage for a period of three years for all non-pelagic trawl fisheries operating in statistical areas 525630 & 525702 and the Chiniak Gully area.
- c) Agreed with research priorities identified by ADF&G.

7. **Public comment:** three-minute (3) limit to individual comments

Alexus Kwachka: Gulf of Alaska trawl vessels should be required to declare if they are on a pelagic or non-pelagic trip. Impacts to the Tanner crab resource should be evaluated for all gear groups. Some trawl closure areas in state waters only apply for non-pelagic trawl. An examination of closed areas may be warranted.

Paddy O' Donnell: Provided insight into modified sweeps in the gulf it is a requirement for flat fish but in the Gulf of Alaska they use it for all nonpelagic trawl as it takes a long time to rig (double) so it goes on at the start of the year and stays on the whole year. Requirements for spacing and height off the sea floor is listed online where anyone can see it and it is all standard. Agreed that an examination of closed areas should be conducted.

8. **Discussion on Scheduling**

June 17th is the next scheduled meeting where Bering Sea crab will be addressed. A late July meeting will be set, with an August meeting to develop policy recommendations for the Task Force to consider.

It was requested by Ms. Madsen that on June 17th the committee hold a discussion summarizing the GOA Tanner crab information and recommendations by industry. The committee should develop a plan on which areas to focus attention for policy decisions.

There was a short committee discussion regarding clarification of the Bering Sea issues and information requests and an acknowledgment that the NPFMC is already addressing Bering Sea crab bycatch and the committee will not attempt to duplicate that effort.

9. Crab committee comments:

The chair noted that a request was made by member Delaney to ADF&G for economic information and some data from the COAR reports has been provided. If desired, additional information requests can be made outside of the meeting.

10. Next Meeting Date: June 17, 2022 beginning at 9 AM

11. Adjournment by 10:30 AM