



Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska Crab Committee Tuesday July 26, 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, Eric Velsko joined later
ABRT members present: Brian Gabriel, Tommy Sheridan, John Jensen
3. Approve agenda: July 26, 2022, Approved with acknowledged additions
4. Approve Minutes: June 17, 2022, defer approval to next meeting.
5. New business:
 - a) **Dr. Diana Stram and Sam Cunningham, North Pacific Fishery Management Council Report:** Dr. Stram went over triggered closure areas for crab in the Bering Sea and how those are set in the groundfish specification process. She went on to discuss the exact limits. Discussed the decline in crab stocks and how this affected the limits set year to year. Sam Cunningham identified a few gaps in data that is significant in how they manage red king crab notably the crab to the north of the survey area and shell health data after the summer survey. There is a link to the presentation made to the council in April on the PowerPoint which is posted to the ABRT site. NPFMC is inviting comment on crab mortality link in the presentation. Snow crab stocks are considered overfished, and the council is in the process of analyzing what it would take to rebuild these stocks and what analysis they need to determine this in a scientific manner. Review and action will take place within two council meetings. Review in December 2022, with action in 2023.
 - b) **Brad Harris, Scott Smeltz, and Felipe Restrepo Alaska Pacific University.** *Presentation: Seascape-scale modelling of benthic habitat disturbance from commercial fishing activities.* Information was presented on Essential Fish Habitat and how that is affected by fishing activities. Using this data, a modeling of habitat disturbance data was developed.

Scott Smeltz walked the committee through the fishing effects models and what this means to the habitat on the ocean floor. A model was presented that showed the impacts to habitat from fishing over a period of nearly 20 years. The model shown is cumulative and the impacts are estimated based on these cumulative disturbances and recovery period. Presented the decision tree set up for NPFMC to make determinations on habitat disturbance.

- c) **Chris Woodley Groundfish Forum Presentation on Flatfish Trawl Sector Recommendation- *BSAI Crab bycatch*:** A brief overview of the Groundfish Forum fleet members. An overview of bycatch since before statehood to present was shown and discussed. Trawl bycatch management tools including gear alterations caps on bycatch among other reduction methods discussed. A bycatch score card was presented highlighting sector, limits, closures, and management agency. Discussed the fleets recommendations for future bycatch reductions.
- d) **Craig Lowenberg Bering Sea Pot Cod Cooperative:** Supports the rationalization of the Pacific cod over 60' sector operating in the BSAI. Noted that the sector, despite not being rationalized, is doing its best to reduce bycatch without rationalization being realized. Recommendation is to initiate the rationalization of this sector through the Council process.
- e) **Cory Lescher with Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers:** Provided industry priorities and recommendations. Discussed current directed fishery actions to minimize bycatch. Presented a summary of bycatch management recommendations. Member Madsen noted that recommendations made will be difficult to enact due to a lack of knowledge on when these instances of crab vulnerability occur.

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

- **Scott Goodman, Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation:** Believes it is in everyone's interest to connect the dots with information. Notes that they do have information that cannot be ignored. This information will never be perfect, but gaps could be further closed to make better recommendations. Supports the tagging of crabs as a high priority as this will really help fill in gaps and this needs to be connected to distribution. Connection between movement and distribution for the season is highest priority. Molting and mating timing has a lot of variability dependent on species, area, and other factors. Understanding recruitment is most important with protecting mature animals molting is a second high priority to fill in. BSFRF is available to assist the committee process.
- **Gretar Gudmundsson:** Asked Sam Cunningham about information lacking outside of the survey timeframe, disagrees with this and wants to know if fish ticket data is considered in filling in the survey gaps. Feels that in-season information should be used to help supplement survey data. Fish and Game closes Crab in late December and if we do not know if mating and molting is occurring at this time then why are we closing fishing.

- **John Gauvin, Alaska Seafood Cooperative:** looking for opportunities to collaborate with the BSFRF looking for ways to contribute knowledge and resources in the tagging efforts requested/described by Cory Lescher and Scott Goodman.
- **Jamie Goen, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers:** Agrees with comments on collaboration between sectors, noted that there have been no responses from the pollock industry or the under 60 pot cod fleet and wants to know if we will be hearing from folks in those groups. Member Madsen noted that the pollock industry is working on recommendations for the NPFMC and don't expect to have those prepared until November.

7. Crab committee and ABRT comments:

- Chair Kozak noted that the August 9th meeting will be looking at recommendations and discuss what is needed in the way of research to further our understanding. Requested that Scott Goodman and John Gauvin be available.
- Member Madsen noted that recommendations from the pollock sector for bycatch reduction will not be ready by August but should be ready closer to October. Noted the ABRT Western Alaska salmon committee will be meeting this Friday at 9am.
- John Jensen: Thanked everyone for their presentations and appreciate the meeting.
- Tommy Sheridan: Appreciated the presentations and thanked everyone for contributing to these meetings. Noted STI meeting this Thursday morning at 8am. Noted House Bill 41 was passed which is shellfish enhancement programs wants to know if there is overlap with this Task force and its recommendations.
<https://alaskapublic.org/2022/05/05/king-crab-hatcheries-could-be-on-alaska-horizon-as-mariculture-bill-moves-past-legislature/>
<https://seagrant.uaf.edu/research/projects/kingcrab/general/>

8. Next Meeting Date: August 9, 2022, 9am

9. Adjournment by 11:48 am