



Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska crab committee Tuesday September 6, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Virtual (Zoom) meeting at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82014194284?pwd=ZmlsSEIBVEFEYXZQQ2VZVHhjkVXUT09>

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 9:00 AM by Chair Linda Kozak
2. Roll call: of committee and ABRT members
Committee members present: Linda Kozak (Chair), Stephanie Madsen, Erik Velsko, Kevin Delaney
ABRT members present: John Jensen
3. Approve agenda: September 6, 2022, approved as modified to allow for public comment before new business.
4. Approve Minutes: August 30, 2022, approved
5. Old Business: **Finalize GOA Tanner crab bycatch management recommendations**
 - *Require 100% observer coverage on all GOA non-pelagic trawl catcher vessels in areas 525702 and 525603 (or all GOA areas)* Approved to move forward as discussed.
 - Chair Kozak went over the recommendations which are posted to the ABRT site calls for a discussion of non-pelagic trawl observer for 3 years recommendation. Thanks Member Madsen for the comments and notes this falls in line with what the report to the ABRT must look like and these issues with final itemization will be addressed in the final report. Chair Kozak again calls for a discussion on the observer coverage for non-pelagic trawl for 3 years. There is some alternate language to consider. The proposal to have trawl vessels declare would be folded into this observer coverage recommendations. Notes the 3 years was suggested as a bridge between the beginning and the end of a rationalization program which would most likely provide 100% observer coverage. Believes the recommendation is just as strong without a time limit attached. While there might be issues with observer coverage that should not stop the committee from making a recommendation. Calls for committee agreement on alternative language and taking out the three-year limit.
 - Member Madsen notes that some of these management recommendations need to be further broken out into what is State management and what is Federal management. The comment about addressed lack of monitoring in SOA waters is solely a state issue possibly even a state engagement issue some of the other recommendations listed are Federal. Notes that gear modification requires research

before any management measures can be made. Takes issue with putting a time period on any kind of recommendation as it is unclear when the three-year timeline starts and that there will be a sunset and then possibly a need to re-recommend this as monitoring might need to continue. Also is not sure if this means Electronic Monitoring (EM) or if this means an actual physical observer vs. just EM or a mix of the 2 types of observer coverage. Also agrees with Member Delaney that 3 years is arbitrary, and we do not know if three years issue is too little or too much.

- Member Delaney feels that 3 years would provide three data points to look at but what if after 3 years you have horrible precision and you need more years or what if after half a year or a year the numbers are exactly what is being reported and the project does not need to continue. Does support observer coverage as a management tool but wants there to be some flexibility in the recommendation.
- Member Velsko agrees with the alternate language as it covers the previous discussion had. Recognizes that three years is arbitrary and could be argued further but the way it is written does make it clearer than previously discussed.

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

- Craig Lowenberg: Bering Sea Pot Cod cooperative. Corrected previous statement of rationalization of all cod sectors and recognizes that it is only trawl at this time. Notes this sector has asked for rationalization for several years. In past rationalization program bycatch reduction is always a goal and there has been success in past programs. Expected benefits from rationalization would reduce bycatch and waste, reduce incidental catch, reduce impacts to marine mammals and slowing the pace of the fishery. It allows the ability to preform test fisheries, adjust start date, and test gear innovations, move gear away for areas of high bycatch, have stand downs and share information and coordinate efforts. PSC caps have been a discussion requests that a review of current discard mortality rates be discussed as well. Asks for recommendation of rationalization plan for this fleet. Responds to member Velsko that ADF&G staff feel observer coverage is adequate and more coverage would increase cost but not increase quality of the data.
 - Chair Kozak asks if Lowenberg is aware of the research priorities forwarded by this committee to include rationalization and gear modification. Suggests looking at research recommendations by this committee
https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/090122_abrt_sti_crab_recommendations.pdf
 - Member Velsko notes rationalization plan would cover many of the recommendations/research from this committee. Asks if the ADF&G managers feel if there is enough data to effectively manage at this point.
- Cory Lescher: with Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers. Thanks everyone on the Committee and the ABRT for all the effort put in. Notes there is a lot of overlap for management and research priorities. From crabbers point of view very interested in protecting female brood stock and molting and mating crab. Feels this consideration is extremely important for management and protecting the habitat areas for these important life stages. Wants to improve PSC management limits, by removing PSC floors should be removed and updated to manage. Unobserved mortality estimates should be looked at closer. The status of crab stocks are so dire at this point that there is no time to wait for research some of these management decisions should be implemented now with changes in the future informed by research. Responds to Member Velsko that yes a proxy placeholder number to allow for immediate management is a huge priority given the state of crab stocks. Provided a brief explanation of PSC limit and how that works spoke to recommendations earlier presented to this committee. Responded to Member Madsen first addressing the council and the crab plan team but feels this committee needs to come forward with a comprehensive list of recommendations and if this is being duplicated in the council arena that is great, but it should not disclude something from the list. As far as unobserved fishing mortality they want to start including estimates in PSC management that these be applied to individual fishing sector caps. As far as movement of crab

agrees yes, we do have a summer snapshot from a trawl survey and hotspot reporting is communicated in the fleets in an efficient way. Relay on the summer trawl survey to inform where crab is during the summer months. However, there is a bunch of other fisheries data that can inform these decisions. Understands the need to relay on science but also encourages looking elsewhere through already available data. Responded to Chair Kozak, what is meant when talking about a proxy for unobserved fishing mortality this is coming up with a number to be used in management until the scientific studies can be completed. There is a range of impacts predicted by research already done and there is a low and high end of this range so taking a proxy number from these previously completed scientific studies that can be used while further directed research is completed. To managing PSC stocks across the entire range, there is a lot of mismanagement there particularly for red king crab anything caught outside of the zone are not counted to the PSC limit. Wants to know why crab inside and outside these zones are treated differently. So, they want to recommend that this be looked at to reevaluate if this is still working. Yes, wants the unobserved mortality proxy to be used in the PSC limit assessment. Notes that addressing discard mortality rate is one of the most important things to look at.

- Member Velsko asked if PSC management and unobserved mortality means that there needs to be a proxy at this point to allow for immediate implementation while research is waited for. Asked for brief explanation of caps and how PSC is calculated for Crab.
 - Member Madsen noted some process points wants some more clarification on how unobserved mortality is being dealt with and notes the crab plan team is going to have a meeting on this. In the stock assessment model, there is a calculation for this unobserved mortality. Notes that there is no way to know where the crab are when the surveys are not being done. With the changing climate these distributions are shifting and wonders how to follow through on the requests being made without the true ability to determine this with no research and not enough surveys.
 - Chair Kozak asked a question about managing PSC stock across the entire range, recognizes that this maybe be good because of the change in movements to all species. But as far as developing a proxy for unobserved mortality that is very nebulous and what would a recommendation on this proxy be? Asked if the proxy for unobserved mortality should be used in the PSC limits? Notes it has been suggested by the Trawl sector to have the IFQ adjusted based on the unobserved crab mortality. Is this request proxy similar to that?
 - Member Delany notes that we need to look at handling mortality wants to come up with recommendations that are comprehensive and that a successful program would include vs. State or Federal management.
- Scott Goodman: Sees this whole Task force as an appreciated way to keep bycatch management as a priority and something that everyone is working to minimize. Has observed a few things in the research list and these suggestion for management. The observer coverage issue in research prioritization regarding movement and applying current data it is the understanding that observer coverage is quite good. Maybe alter the statement to be assess observer coverage. Believes the idea of pa proxy for any estimate is very important and as discussed so far is something that is difficult to target but is important in continued management while research is ongoing. Within the idea of effective management, a program needs to be effective overall and incentives need to be realized. During a stressful period for any stocks, you want your impact avoidance measures to be incentive based.
 - Chis Woodley: Went over recommendations provided on the 26th of July. These are available on the ABRT site under the Crab committee July 26th. Responded to Member Madsen that yes that is how an EFP would work but wants to get support from SOA to add to the process but is not specific to tis task force. For bottom contact gear there currently exist full time area closures in 508 and 512 as well as red king crab saving area. As a result of the low amount s of red king crab abundance the saving area was expanded for 2022, so also no fishing in the sub area. On top of that is a seasonal closure in area 516 to protect spawning and migrating crab and that is just for red king crab so there

are further area for other crab species. Wants to better understand the location of where red king crab are during a winter survey as well as the summer one. Once this review is done do these closure areas make sense? That is the review being requested. Responds to Member Velsko that is the stock assessment process vs. actual management process. Say if crab fisherman are in an area getting legal but not marketable males that quota of bringing non marketable crab up will incentivize them to either retain the less marketable crab for sale or move to an area that contains more marketable crab. This is not a stock assessment thing but a management thing for operators to avoid areas with possible bycatch. Notes that this should be addressed given if the fishery was open this would begin to occur again. Agrees with chair that some of these things could be further studied but that some of these things would create incentives. Notes that everything this fleet brings up has to be retained and it counts against the quota.

- Member Madsen: Noted the development of an EFP to allow deck sorting isn't this normally something is developed by industry and goes before the council. Wants to know what the expectation is for the State and Council to do on this issue. Asked about review of open and closed areas to bottom trawling. What specifically would be reviewed in the open and closed areas for crab. Appreciated the clarification there. Wants to know if they are already closed would we just be reviewing efficacy? Or What?
- Member Velsko: Would discards be an additional removal from the individual IFQ on top of the current ADF&G tax. Feels this is not as important given that the entire fishery has been closed so these removals of legal but not marketable crab are not occurring
- Chair Kozak notes there are questions with this, and the assumed discard mortality rate numbers are way too conservative to allow a buffer. Feels some of the suggestions would be better informed by research. Feels research is a the key to looking into these suggestions. Assumed discard mortality rate is set as a very conservative number but it may not be accurate.

7. New business:

- **Discussions on management measures for Bering Sea crab bycatch**
- *Rationalization of the > 60ft pot cod fishery* Approved to move forward.
- *Create prohibited species caps for pot cod fishery amended to examine the PSC caps in the pot cod fishery prior to rationalization* Approved to move forward
 - Member Velsko notes we do want to look at DMRs thinks this is covered in research.
 - Chair Kozak notes a lot of members and industry want a study on what the actual DMR is. Given changes in industry and technology since the last time this was looked into.
 - Member Madsen wants to amend to examine the PSC caps in the pot cod fishery prior to rationalization does not have a problem making a point of this but does not want to confuse the public.
- *Evaluation of observer coverage and monitoring for the directed crab and pot cod fisheries* Approved to move forward as amended.
 - Chair Kozak notes Scott Goodman had a recommendation in this same vain, is a co-chair to the crab observer program and received report on the information gathered from this program. There are not enforcement aspects in the directed crab observer program. Does not mind suggesting evaluation instead of Increase.
 - Member Delaney notes these are in constant need for evaluation
- *Require pelagic trawlers to limit bottom contact to no more than 10% of the time.* *** Review or consider revising pelagic gear definition to limit bottom contact. Not agreed upon by the committee 3 of the 4 supported.
 - Member Madsen does not agree with this as it is something hard to know by the trawlers and hard to enforce. Does not want this to move forward. Feels that given experience of people not believing trawlers on bottom contact and putting net sensors on large nets is not practical at this point. Does not support it or the redefining of pelagic trawl.

- Chair Kozak notes that pelagic gear does not have a bottom contact restriction in the Bering Sea and there is a high percentage in some cases of when the gear may be in contact but there is some review needed. Is open to a change in wording. Feels it is important to note when there is not agreement. Looks forward to full task force discussion.
 - Member Velsko Points out that this recommendation is largely unenforceable in the GOA. Notes that the definition may be the problem as this was assumed to be mid water nets but sometimes, they are touching the bottom so the definition might need to be re-worked.
 - Member Delaney agrees with Member Velsko that a definition change is probably what is needed here.
 - ABRT Member Jensen agreed that non consensus is okay and that this will be further discussed by the ABRT as a whole.
- Review open and closed areas to bottom trawling. Changed to: *Review effectiveness of fixed open and closed areas for trawling and continue to examine methods to develop flexible spatial management.* Moved forward as agreed upon
 - Chair Kozak notes that is following crab through seasonal and environmental changes. The seasonal nature of movement has already been discussed and this might be in research. Feels there will not be consensus here so including both sets of language would be best to move forward so further discussion can be had. If trawl is largely on the bottom in critical areas then there are impacts and those need to be considered.
 - Member Madsen requested a change to wording. Responds to member Velsko that this is meant to address open and closed areas and his request to change wording does not make sense in this context. Does not want to have a big battle over pelagic trawl's impact on crab habitat. Responds to Chair Kozak Does not want to loose that we want to move from open and closed areas to spatial management because we know crab move around. Afraid we are going to loose that thread if too much focus is given on what effect trawl gear has on crab habitat. Thinks that in a changing climate fixed closures have seen their day and that the path forward is flexible spatial management.
 - Member Velsko rephrase this to all trawl gear contacting the bottom
 - Member Delaney notes open and closed areas are management tools. Feels there is some agreement to these open and closed areas and research needed. Thinks there is consensus that closing areas to reduce bycatch mortality is a good management tool. Feels that this specificity is leading to disagreements.
- Develop EFP to allow for deck sorting of live BBRKC crab bycatch for Amendment 80 vessels. Agreed to move to research
 - Member Madsen feels that this should be moved over to research. Not familiar with the idea of this but recognizes if crab is bycaught then the crabbers would want these crab put back in the water. Should be a separate bullet under the crab research.
 - Chair Kozak asks what section Member Madsen feels this recommendation should go to.
 - Member Velsko and Delaney agree to move this to research.
- Manage prohibited species caps across the entire range of the stock. Changed to: *Examine impacts of counting PSC limits to whole Bering Sea area.* Agreed upon as changed.
 - Chair Kozak feels this could be tied into the effectiveness of the open and closed areas. As crab moves why does the cap not move with it. Developed as being critical habitat areas for certain stocks there was not perceived to be large movement of crab outside of the range. Feels this is important to look into further given the greater movement of species due to changing climate condition.
 - Member Delaney would like to know the history to these caps. Feels that these areas might be the only places where score could be kept well enough to provide a cap.
 - Member Madsen notes a change to language to be clearer.
 - Member Velsko could go either way on the language is concerned about the floor as well

as the cap. Concerns with cobalt's box possibly not capturing all of the PSC impacts. Does agree this ties in with open and closed areas discussion. Static boxes everywhere should be in question as the current efficacy of the static closed areas is up for debate.

- *Examine possibility of seasonal closures in hot spot areas to pot cod gear both inside and outside state waters.* Agreed to move forward
 - Member Madsen asked if there are existing closures. Notes we don't know what the impacts are until you study it.
 - Chair Kozak responded to Member Madsen no there are no existing closures.
 - Member Velsko notes the impacts have been captured but in ease of putting everyone on a level playing field this should be looked at.
 - Member Delaney asks if pot cod closure would add utility to the information? If we are just doing this to create a level playing field and not gain further useful information than this is not something to support.
- Proxy number in management for unobserved mortality. Member Velsko agrees to table this for another meeting
 - Member Velsko brought forth this request and feels this is very important given a placeholder is needed while research is being done to protect crab stocks. Wants to see some number other than zero. Member Velsko notes this is factored into the stock assessment but not into PSC management. Will think further about this.
 - Chair Kozak struggles with this one. How do you develop a proxy for something that requires more research to come up with a number that makes sense and is not just a guess. Is uncomfortable moving forward with a request to pull a number from thin air.
- Examine the impact of retaining legal crab and counting towards IFQ.
 - Member Madsen Suggests this and knows there may not be consensus but wants to get it on the table for discussion. Feels this is the same as unobserved mortality or counting PSC outside a designated area. If legal crab is not being retained this should be counted for somewhere. Notes that discards should be counted regardless, and it is unfair to focus on unobserved mortality and PSC counts for the directed crab fishery to not retain legal crab because of how it looks. There is no incentive to move at this point out of areas with dirty crab. This would be a way for the fleet to change their behavior. There should be incentives for people to move off of crab that is not marketable. Counting against IFQ is an option but there should be incentives to move out of these areas.
 - Chair Kozak brought up the point of what to do with ugly crab and that processors won't accept it with a certain number of barnacles. Thinks it would be good to support an expression of concern for legal crab not being retained due to it being "ugly" If the crab is not accepted by the processor, it is worse than dead loss. Agrees with Member Madsen that incentives to move are important. Notes that committee agrees retention of legal crab is very important.
 - Member Velsko feels that this would be a different discussion in the 90s vs. now. Does not feel it makes sense to look at direct fishery discards of legal but ugly crab because the fisheries have been closed it is automatically zero. Feels there is no utility with closed fisheries.
 - Member Delany wants to note we discussed this issue at length and both sides of the argument are valid but nothing can be done at this point given the fishery is closed.
- Discussions on State management on bycatch
- *Establish a way to better communicate bycatch information to the public, including website development, outreach, and possible forums.* Agreed upon to move forward.
 - Chair Kozak introduced and knows the wording may need to be worked on
 - Member Madsen supports this and has been suggested at WAK salmon committee
- *Create a bycatch policy advisor position to in the Governor's office.* Agreed to move forward to

have further discussion in the ABRT as a whole with discussion items listed to be considered.

- Member Delaney takes issue with the placement of this position in the Governor's office. Feels this should be housed in ADF&G or wants to hear the Commissioner's opinion on this.
- Member Velsko agrees that ADF&G should be involved either in the housing/appointment of this position. Likes the idea just not sure of the placement
- Member Madsen doesn't understand what this person would do everyday if the fleets are doing their job on bycatch. If better communication is achieved maybe this point person position is not relevant.
- Chair Kozak notes there has generally been a fish policy advisor in the Governor's office supports having a designated person be it in the Governor's office or ADF&G. Preferably the Governor's office to have a conduit to the Governor regarding fisheries and bycatch.
- *Develop a state bycatch policy* agreed to forward for discussion without a recommendation to Task Force.
 - Member Kozak suggests this could be encompassed in previous conversation
 - Member Delaney there is no definition of bycatch or bycatch policy in ADF&G regulation. Wants to propose a definition of bycatch be discussed and put forward to the Board of Fish that would then be written into regulation. Wants the definition in the AO to be out into regulation. A proposal for both a bycatch definition and SOA policy on bycatch should be put into regulation.
 - Member Madsen notes the Governor provided a definition of bycatch could this be provided to the Board. Wants to know if this definition is accurate or if something else is being asked for.
- *Use the Task Force as a template to create a permanent bycatch advisory body.* Agreed to move forward for discussion.
 - Chair Kozak notes this would be a body that would meet a few times a year and make current recommendations to the Department/ Governor.
 - Member Velsko notes bycatch issues are always changing and that something ongoing would be good for ongoing changes. This could be very useful for the public
 - Member Delaney feels that having a more permanent process with people involved in real time awareness. Wants bycatch policy to be defined in regulation and a subcommittee within the Board of Fish to take in public testimony and staff information on bycatch much like the hatchery committee.

8. Public Comment

- Julie Bonney: Finds the process difficult to follow and wants to see a written document for interaction by the public.
 - Chair Kozak responds regarding information on the process.

9. Crab committee and ABRT comments

- Chair Kozak reiterated the ABRT and committee process.

10. Adjournment by 12:05 pm