

## ***Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force Recommendations Progress Report – Spring 2025***

This report addresses the following Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force Recommendations:

- Six state engagement recommendations
- Three general research recommendations
- Management recommendations

### **STATE ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation:** Establish a process for providing bycatch-related information and resources that is understandable and easily accessible.

#### **Progress:**

1. *Continued development of a bycatch website to provide upcoming meeting information, presentations and links to sites of interest.*
2. *Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC) virtual meetings provided presentations on how to access bycatch information at the NPRMC, NMFS and state levels, as well as updates on state engagement, research and management actions.*
3. *Annual progress reports provides updates on ABRT recommendations and other bycatch information.*

**Recommendation:** Offer the public an opportunity to provide input on NPFMC issues before each NPFMC meeting.

#### **Progress:**

1. *State officials meet virtually and in person with Alaskan stakeholders before each NPFMC meeting.*
2. *Deputy Commissioner attends Bycatch Advisory Council meetings and testimony is taken at each meeting on bycatch issues.*
3. *ADF&G Commissioner initiated a series of townhall meetings on bycatch.*

**Recommendation:** Create a permanent bycatch advisory entity.

**Progress:** *ADF&G Commissioner established the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council in 2023 and made it effective for three years.*

**<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=bycatchtaskforce.meetinginfo>**

**Recommendation:** Support legislative action to remove the sunset of the Education Tax Credit Program and expand to allow for gear modification or technology improvements that help reduce bycatch.

**Progress:** *This legislation was finalized and in effect through 2028.*

**Recommendation:** Work with other entities to improve information on the bycatch of Chinook and chum salmon taken in Russian domestic fisheries.

**Progress:** *The State of Alaska and North Pacific Fishery Management Council continue to urge the State Department to provide accountability through observers or other means to determine Chinook and chum take by Russian vessels.*

**Recommendation:** Develop a State of Alaska Bycatch Policy.

**Progress:** *This issue has not been addressed.*

## **RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

***NOTE:*** *Following is a summary of research recommendations with an update on progress. A detailed report on research recommendations is included in the final ABRT report available for review at the following link:*

[https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/abrt\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/abrt_final_report.pdf)

### ***General Recommendations for Process in Developing Research Priorities:***

1. Develop state bycatch research priorities, utilizing input from communities, Alaska Native tribes, industry, and the public, to share with funding entities that would help identify and acquire research funds.
2. Implement strategies to encourage and facilitate industry/agency cooperative research to reduce bycatch and associated mortality.
3. Create methods for collaboration with Alaska Native tribes, organizations and other research entities to better track proposed or funded bycatch research, along with developing opportunities for cooperative projects and combined reporting of findings.

**Progress:** *The State of Alaska is working with Tribes, communities, industry, and the public to receive input and inform on bycatch research projects.*

## **MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation:** The State of Alaska should support taking incremental measures through the regulatory process to improve bycatch utilization with a particular focus on species that are otherwise marketable but are caught with non-targeted gear, or discards in a directed fishery that are required by regulation.

### **Progress:**

1. *The Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council established a working group to investigate the logistical, regulatory, economic, and political issues that would need to be addressed. An emphasis will be on high value species. A final report was provided to the BAC in April of 2024. A link to that report is shown below:*

[https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/041624\\_abac\\_report.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/041624_abac_report.pdf)

2. *The North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a motion at the October 2023 meeting to support a discussion paper by National Marine Fisheries Service concerning management of the maximum retainable amount regulations. The approved motion is shown below and initial review of that issue is planned for the April 2025 meeting:*

<https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=a0f8d725-3df1-4ff7-bd61-9636b39a33a4.pdf&fileName=E%20Council%20Motion%20MRA.pdf>

## **Gulf of Alaska Fixed Gear**

**Recommendation:** Following gear modification research, consider regulations for the directed crab fishery and pot cod fishery to reduce incidental take and discard mortality.

**Progress:** *While industry continues to experiment with various gear modifications to reduce incidental take and discard mortality, no regulations have been recommended.*

**Recommendation:** Address the lack of monitoring in the directed Tanner crab and state waters pot cod fisheries.

**Progress:** *There is currently no action on this issue.*

## **Gulf of Alaska Trawl Gear**

**Recommendation:** Review the open and closed areas in the Gulf of Alaska for pelagic and non-pelagic trawl gear and consider closing new/additional areas to reduce the bycatch of halibut, salmon and Tanner crab.

*Progress: An extended discussion paper for GOA Tanner Crab protections was approved and is scheduled for review at the April 2025 NPFMC meeting.*

**Recommendation:** To better quantify removals of prohibited species, it is recommended that trawl catcher vessels in the Gulf of Alaska be required to have 100% observer coverage when engaged in non-pelagic trawling. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work to obtain funding, either through specific appropriations and/or grants for the additional coverage.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that a regulatory requirement be approved for the Gulf of Alaska pelagic trawl fleet, including any tenders of pelagic trawl caught fish, to have 100% electronic monitoring. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work with National Marine Fisheries Service, our federal delegation, and others to work to acquire funding to install electronic monitoring equipment on all GOA catchers and tenders.

*Progress: This action has been approved for the pelagic trawl fleet fishing for pollock in the Gulf of Alaska and was implemented beginning in 2025.*

**Recommendation:** It is recommended the State of Alaska propose that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council consider development of an abundance-based management program for halibut bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska as a way to address bycatch during fluctuations of halibut biomass.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the State of Alaska investigate the value of requiring full retention of Tanner crab in all GOA trawl fisheries for a period of time to adequately assess removals.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

**Recommendation:** As a means of reducing and managing bycatch and associated mortality of high value species within the Gulf of Alaska, it is recommended that rationalization-type management tools be considered.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

## **Bering Sea Fixed Gear**

**Recommendation:** Evaluate possible seasonal closures in hot spot areas for pot gear both inside and outside of state managed waters.

*Progress: NPFMC initiated an analysis to consider closures of the red king crab savings area for federally managed pot gear. This was reviewed at the February 2024 NPFMC meeting. The NPFMC did not move forward with a regulatory action of pot gear.*

**Recommendation:** Consider a rationalization program for the 60' and greater pot cod vessels as a way to manage bycatch and examine prohibited species caps as part of a rationalization program.

*Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering a cooperative type of rationalization program for this fleet. A discussion paper is scheduled for the June 2025 meeting.*

**Recommendation:** Evaluate the observer coverage and monitoring for the directed crab and pot cod fisheries.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

**Recommendation:** Examine the impact of retaining all legal crab in the directed crab fishery and counting toward IFQ.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*

## **Bering Sea Trawl Gear**

**Recommendation:** Establish a scientific-based chum salmon cap to reduce bycatch in the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea.

*Progress: NPFMC initiated an analysis on development of a chum cap at the April 2023 meeting. Several iterations of the analysis have occurred and final action is tentatively scheduled for the December 2025 meeting.*

**Recommendation:** Review effectiveness of fixed open and closed areas for trawling and continue to examine methods to develop flexible spatial management.

*Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is developing a pelagic trawl definition and has requested a discussion paper on trawl gear innovation to reduce bycatch. Both items are scheduled for review at the June 2025 NPFMC meeting.*

**Recommendation:** The State should work to achieve real time genetic reporting that provides the composition of Western Alaska salmon in the bycatch. This can then be used in management of the pollock fishery to avoid areas and times when Western Alaska salmon are on the grounds in the Bering Sea.

*Progress: Industry and agency research continues to work on the development of real time genetic reporting. A report on preliminary findings for the chum salmon of the Bering Sea was presented at the February 2025 NPFMC meeting.*

**Recommendation:** A review is recommended for the Bering Sea trawl area prohibited species caps (PSC) in relation to crab to be supported by the State of Alaska. This review would examine the impacts to the resource and trawl sector if trawl crab PSC were to be applied across the entire Bering Sea area, instead of only the current sub-areas.

*Progress: This action has not yet been initiated.*