

Submitted on behalf of Board member Jensen

BY ALASKA BERING SEA CRABBERS

[DRAFT]

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

FINDING OF EMERGENCY FOR THE BERING SEA TANNER CRAB FISHERY FOR THE
REMAINDER OF THE 2016/2017 TANNER CRAB SEASON

2017-xx-FB

January 13, 2017

The Alaska Board of Fisheries finds that an emergency exists and emergency regulations providing for a total allowable catch for the 2016/2017 season in the Tanner crab fishery of 4,000,000 pounds of legal size males in the portion of the Bering Sea District that is west of 166° W longitude are necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, safety, or general welfare. The facts constituting the emergency include the following:

Economic opportunities for harvesters, processors, and communities dependent on Bering Sea crab resources are limited. Many remote Alaska communities are highly dependent on harvest of Bering Sea Tanner crab resources for their continued well-being. Decreases in crab abundance for other species in recent years have limited economic opportunities for participants in Bering Sea Tanner crab fisheries due to reasons that are beyond the control of those participants.

Bering Sea crab stock assessments are produced and approved in a highly structured, peer-reviewed, and constantly evolving public process resulting in the annual publication of the best available science in the Crab Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report. The Crab Plan Team (CPT) and Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) are comprised of Federal and State of Alaska scientists that collaboratively produce stock assessments consistent with the fishery management principles defined in the federal Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs (Crab FMP). These stock assessments are initially recommended by the Crab Plan Team and later reviewed and approved by the Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to create the final version of the Crab SAFE. According to the 2016 Crab SAFE Report, the Tanner crab stock is not overfished and overfishing not occurring. The stock is not depressed and has been classified as rebuilt since 2012. Mature male biomass has generally been rising since 2011/2012. With a projected BMSY of 177%, the CPT and SSC determined the Tanner crab stock to be one of the healthiest in the Bering Sea. For 2016 there is an estimated total mature male biomass of 99.95 million pounds, with the mature male population in the western portion of the Eastern Subdistrict increasing 13% since 2015. The CPT and SSC approved a 2016/2017 overfishing limit (OFL) of 56.46 million pounds and an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 45.17 million pounds, the latter of which serves as the upper limit on the range of potential catch limits that would represent a sustainable harvest level. While this does not take into account the ADF&G harvest strategy, it demonstrates the CPT and SSC's confidence in the health of the Tanner crab stock. Additionally, new information presented by the cooperative research partners provides compelling evidence that the mature female portion of the Tanner crab population may be underestimated for 2016.

In October 2016, the Board originally noticed an intent to review Proposal 278 (formally RC 40), a proposal that would revise the current Tanner crab harvest policy regulations, at its January 2017 meeting. However, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and participants

Submitted on behalf of Board member Jensen

in the Tanner crab fishery expressed concern about the proposal, including concerns about replacing existing harvest policies in a manner that is inconsistent with existing findings under the Board's *Policy on King and Tanner Crab Resource Management (90-04-FB)*, and that could unintentionally result in ineffective regulations that may result in fishery closures in the future unless the proposal is limited to the 2016/17 season. The Board reviewed these concerns and determined that it would be impossible to resolve these concerns in time to adopt regular harvest policy regulations that would be effective in time to allow for a Tanner crab fishery for the 2016/2017 season. Hence, an emergency rule is the only viable option to provide a conservative total allowable catch for the remainder of the 2016/2017 Tanner crab season in the western portion of the Eastern Subdistrict, the area with a substantial surplus of harvestable mature male biomass.

In the absence of emergency regulations, harvesters would not be able to harvest Tanner crab during the 2016/2017 season due to the need to complete harvest of Tanner crab resources before the end of the commercial season on March 31 and the start of summer molt. Failure to have regulations in effect for the remainder of the 2016/2017 Tanner crab season would preclude the fishery and would be highly detrimental to the welfare of the harvesters, processors, and remote Alaskan communities that are dependent on the crab fisheries. Notwithstanding the female threshold, calculation of a TAC through the current harvest strategy would have resulted in an available 2016/2017 TAC of approximately 8 million pounds. Establishing a TAC of 4 million pounds applies very conservative (50%) buffer to accommodate remaining uncertainty.

Based on the foregoing facts, an emergency exists and emergency regulations with an immediate effective date, providing for a total allowable catch of 4,000,000 pounds of legal size males in the western portion of the Eastern Subdistrict of the Tanner crab fishery would provide a reasonable opportunity for Tanner crab to be harvested in a biologically sustainable manner in the Bering Sea and are necessary in order to preserve general welfare. The Board delegates authority to the Commissioner or the commissioner's designee to prepare and file a formal finding of emergency, if necessary, along with the emergency regulations that reflect the Board's action taken during the January 10-13, 2017 meeting.

ADOPTED: _____

VOTE: _____

ABSTAIN: _____

John Jensen, Chair