



March 6, 2018

Chairman Jensen and members of the Board:

My name is John Hilsinger and I live in Anchorage. I am here representing the Aleutian King Crab Research Foundation (Foundation) regarding proposal 229. The Foundation submitted this proposal to change the 20 year old regulations regarding the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of Aleutian Islands golden king crab, which set a cap on the harvest in both the eastern and western areas based on the best available information at that time. Since then, there have been two small upward regulatory adjustments to the TAC. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Department) can reduce the harvest below the cap as they have in the western area for the last two years, but cannot increase it above the cap. The Department, with cooperation since 2012 from scientists funded by the Foundation, spent many years developing a golden king crab stock assessment model. This model has now been accepted by the North Pacific Management Council's Crab Plan Team and Scientific and Statistical Committee, which use it to set the Over Fishing Limit (OFL) and the Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) for the stock. There is enough information available from the model to better assess what a sustainable harvest would be given current stock conditions.

The Department and the Foundation have been working closely together to develop a harvest strategy as required by the regulations and have met on several occasions to discuss how to proceed. Doing it well requires developing a simulation model that projects crab abundance into the future under each harvest strategy option. The Foundation contracted with Dr. Steve Martell, an expert modeler, who has been working closely with Dr. Shareef Siddeek to complete this work. We appreciate the investment of time by both Westward Region and Headquarters staff in this effort. Their openness to working together on this issue is really appreciated. Unfortunately, it is not complete yet. Both we and the Department acknowledge that the time it's taking to do this well is longer than expected. We are continuing collaboration with the Department and support the Department bringing a completed harvest strategy back for your consideration.

In the meantime, we support the idea of modifying the regulations to give the Department the flexibility to modify the TAC either up or down. This interim step is expected to last only one year until the harvest strategy is developed. Decisions to modify the TAC would be made based on the outputs of the model, data collected during the fishery, and survey results in the east with the aim of maintaining a healthy and sustainable fishery.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I'd be happy to answer any questions.