

PROPOSAL 262

5 AAC 35.517. Bering Sea *C. opilio* Tanner crab harvest strategy.

Modify the Bering Sea *C. opilio* harvest strategy definition of “exploited legal males”, as follows:

Revise the harvest strategy definition of “exploited legal males” to allow for periodic changes in the size of exploited legal males, as follows:

...

(d) For the purposes of this section,

(5) "exploited legal males" means 100 percent of the new-shell plus a percentage of the old-shell male *C. opilio* Tanner crab that are of a size defined by ADF&G preseason during TAC setting and greater than the legal size; the percentage of old-shell male *C. opilio* Tanner crab will be based on the expected fishery selectivity for old-shell verses new-shell male *C. opilio* Tanner crab;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The basic framework of the Bering Sea snow crab harvest strategy applies an exploitation rate to the estimated mature male biomass or a percentage of exploited legal males to establish annual harvest limits. Currently, the legal minimum size for Bering sea snow crab (*C. opilio* Tanner crab) is 3.1 inches. However, an industry preferred size of 4 inches or larger is used to prosecute the fishery, thus, 4 inch or larger male snow crab are defined as “exploited legal males” in the harvest strategy. Retaining crab at industry preferred size provides for better product recovery and market yield relative to smaller sized legal crab.

During the TAC setting process, harvest limits are scaled to the abundance of exploitable legal males to avoid overharvest of the largest crab in the population. Recent information is showing that some *Chionoecetes* crab may reach maturity and terminal molt below 4 inches, meaning they would never enter the fishery under the current definition of exploited legal males. Providing flexibility to the definition of “exploited legal males” in the harvest strategy, would allow the definition to adapt to changes in the industry preferred size while remaining above the minimum legal male size of 3.1 inches. Lowering the industry preferred size (for example to 3.8 inches) would result in benefits to the Alaskan snow crab resource consistent with Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standards and the *Board’s Policy on King and Tanner Crab Resource Management*. Specifically, these benefits include but are not limited to: 1) increased abundance of exploited legal males available to the fishery resulting in higher TACs in some years, and potentially reduced inter-annual variation in TAC levels; 2) improved vessel harvest efficiency; 3) reduced discard mortality of legal snow crab.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers

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