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ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
DECISIONS REGARDING
MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC KING CRAB FISHERIES
IN THE BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AREA (OFF ALASKA)
APRIL 1988

88-1241-FB

During its March 1981 meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries developed the Joint Statement of Principles on the Management of Domestic King Crab Fisheries and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BS/AI) King Crab Fishery Management Framework. These documents, which were prepared in cooperation with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, clearly define the roles of both entities in the management of the domestic king crab fishery in the BS/AI area. The board and the council formally adopted the Joint Statement of Principles in October 1981 as an interim measure until formal implementation of the framework plan by the Secretary of Commerce.

In conformance with the above mentioned documents and recognizing its responsibility for management of the domestic king crab fisheries in the BS/AI area, the board received public testimony and reviewed recommendations by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Alaska Department of Public Safety (ADPS), Alaska Department of Law (ADL), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). During its April 1988 meeting, the board discussed at length the issues related to regulations managing these fisheries. Unfortunately, the board was unable to meet with the council for shellfish discussions or to participate in the Joint Board/Council public hearing on March 25 in Seattle. The decisions of the board are presented in summary in this report. Further details are available on the tape record of the board meeting.

Seasons

Since its development in late 1982, the Dutch Harbor brown king crab fishery has been conducted as a developing fishery under conditions of a permit. Harvests have averaged over 1.6 million pounds for the last six years and the area is fully exploited. Management as a developing fishery is no longer appropriate. Based on recommendations of industry representatives and area advisory committees, a regulatory opening date of September 1 was selected for this fishery. This date provides a good lead in to the Adak brown king crab fishery, gives crab fishing vessels an alternative to participation in the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery, and gives processors product before the start of the Bristol Bay fishery.

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A 12:00 noon opening time was provided in regulations for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery and a 12:00 noon closing time was provided for the Adak brown king crab fishery. The opening and closing dates for both fisheries were not changed. Previous regulations omitted the time of the opening and closure, requiring emergency orders in season to announce those times. The 12:00 noon opening and closure times have been used in other crab fisheries in the BS/AI area for ease of enforcement.

The board rejected proposals to change season dates for the Pribilof red and blue, Bristol Bay red, and Adak red king crab fisheries. Current seasons are biologically acceptable, provide an orderly progression between fisheries, and yield a product quality which is generally considered acceptable. A reduction in the size limit for Bristol Bay red king crab was rejected, since the stock is currently depressed and in the process of recovery. Some members of the public also expressed concern over the marketability of smaller king crab. A proposal for a five day bait up period in Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea was rejected due to the currently depressed stock conditions, and to concerns that a bait up period would encourage the placement of additional gear and would further shorten the fishery.

Area Registration and Check-Out

Dutch Harbor was designated as the contact location for vessel operators wishing to check out of the Adak area. Previous regulations specified Dutch Harbor as the check out point for Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea, but neglected to designate a check out point for Adak.

The board also recognized that regulations requiring vessels to offload crab within 24 hours of the closure of a registration area may not be appropriate in remote areas of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. To address this problem, the board adopted a committee compromise which provides flexible delivery deadlines based on the fishing area and the port of anticipated delivery. If the delivery is made in the same district or registration area in which the crab were taken, the existing 24 hour delivery requirement still applies. If the delivery is made to Dutch Harbor, Akutan, or King Cove from the following areas, the delivery requirement is:

1. Bristol Bay - 24 hours
2. Pribilof District - 24 hours
3. Norton Sound Section - variable, specified in Nome

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4. St. Matthew Island Section - 48 hours
5. St. Lawrence Island Section - 72 hours

For deliveries made east of King Cove, the vessel operator must contact ADF&G in Dutch Harbor to receive a delivery time.

Lithodes King Crab Fishery

The board authorized a new permit fishery for *Lithodes cousei* king crab. Industry representatives expressed interest in exploring the availability of this resource. The fishery is restricted to pots, which may be longlined in areas where longlining of pots is permitted for brown king crab, and generally to waters 100 fathoms or greater in depth. The permit may specify operating areas, fishing seasons, and minimum size limits. It may also require that observers be on board the vessel during operations and may require a logbook report.

St. Lawrence Island Winter Fishery

The board recognized the existence of a winter fishery through the ice for king crab in the vicinity of St. Lawrence Island. The fishery had existed for several years outside the regulations and provided a needed source of winter income for villagers in the area. A November 15 through May 15 season was adopted, identical to the existing winter season in Norton Sound, and the fishery was given the same exemptions from registration, landing, tendering, and gear regulations.

In a related issue, the board adopted a proposal to align the exemption section for the Norton Sound winter fishery with the current November 15 through May 15 season. The season dates for the Norton Sound winter fishery were changed at the spring 1985 board meeting; changes to dates in the section dealing with exemptions were overlooked at that time.

Shellfish Onboard Observer Program - Statewide

The board heard extensive testimony from staff and the public regarding the impacts of a rapidly expanding catcher/processor fleet in shellfish fisheries throughout the state. Substantial harvests in some fisheries are now taken and processed entirely at sea, limiting the value of the customary shoreside collection of needed biological and management data. In addition, the board heard staff testimony regarding violations of size and sex

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regulations by catcher/processor vessel and saw catch statistics which clearly demonstrated that some operators of these vessels have routinely failed to comply with king crab size limit regulations. For these reasons, the board required that all vessels processing red, blue, or brown king crab, or *C. bairdi* Tanner crab, carry an onboard observer during all processing operations. Exceptions are provided for vessels that process in locations where ADF&G shore-based samplers are located. ADF&G was authorized to develop guidelines and regulations to implement the program by the September 25, 1988 opening of the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery.

King Crab Harvest Strategy - Statewide

The board replaced its current exploitation rate table with a statement of the types of information which can be used to establish guideline harvest levels. The previous harvest strategy was not applicable for all king crab stocks statewide. It was not possible to apply the table of exploitation rates to stocks for which there was inadequate information. In other instances, rigid application of the table produced illogical conclusions. The table would have required, for example, exploitation rates of 30-35 percent on stocks with insignificant, but stable levels of prerecruits. The statement which was adopted is more compatible with provisions of the proposed NPFMC fishery management plan which require that exploitation rates and guideline harvest levels be calculated using the best available information.

Miscellaneous Statewide Regulations

Fishermen who wish to participate in a commercial king crab fishery are now prohibited from fishing in that area with subsistence or personal use king or Tanner crab pots during the 14 days before the commercial opening. The board was concerned with reports that some individuals may use subsistence or personal use pots to prospect for and stockpile crab prior to the commercial opening.

The board required that valid interim use permits be in the possession of the vessel operator at the time of final tank inspection. A tank inspection is generally the last activity required of a vessel to validate its registration before departure for the fishing grounds. The inspection now also represents a last opportunity to insure that all required documentation is in order before crab are taken.

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The board clarified an existing regulation to require that fish tickets be submitted within seven days of landing. It also clarified that citations of water depth in pot storage and other regulations are measured from mean lower low water unless otherwise specified.

The board rejected a statewide proposal to reduce the size limit for king crab to six inches. A reduction in the size limit is not appropriate in many areas, since it would increase the exploitation rates on already depressed stocks. A proposal to allow a five day period of pot storage on the grounds before the opening of crab seasons statewide was rejected. Many crab fisheries are already extremely short and the board was concerned that a bait up period would only encourage the placement of additional gear and would further shorten these fisheries. A statewide proposal dealing with storage of conical pots was modified to exclude the BS/AI area.

Gary Slaven, Chairman
Alaska Board of Fisheries

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Anchorage, AK