

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON BOARD OF FISHERIES PROPOSAL #348**Aleutian Islands Golden King Crab Total Allowable Catch**

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Fishery Overview:

The Aleutian Islands golden king crab directed fishery began in 1981 and the directed catch by six vessels in that season was 1.3 million pounds. The vessels participating were as high as 204 in 1983/84, but averaged between 15-22 vessels in the eight years before the rationalization program was implemented. The harvest prior to the 1996 season appears to directly relate to the number of vessels, with a high of 14.6 million pounds in the 1986/87 season.

In 1996 the Alaska Board of Fisheries moved the boundary and created a distinct eastern and western district with a GHF for each area. The total was 5.9 million pounds, with 3.2 in the eastern area and 2.7 in the western area. At this time the CPUE of the fishery had ranged between 5-7 crab for the past three years and no concern was expressed by the department regarding the health of the resource.

The fishery became rationalized in 2005 and since that time the number of vessels participating in the cooperative fishery has averaged two to three for each area.

The eastern area has historically had a triennial pot survey (three total surveys), but there has not been a survey since 2006. ADF&G is working with the Aleutian King Crab Research Foundation to develop a pot survey for the eastern and western Aleutian Islands. A small mesh pot experiment was conducted in the eastern area in 2012 by ADF&G with Foundation and industry participation, which provided information on sublegal and female crab. This information proved to be very helpful and eased department concerns. It is hoped by industry and the Foundation that development of a pot survey can be completed and a pilot project implemented in 2014, with an annual survey to begin in 2015.

Model History:

The Aleutian Islands golden king crab stock assessment model has been under development since at least 2007. There have been several versions of the model presented, but it has not been approved by the Crab Plan Team or Scientific and Statistical Committee of the NPFMC. Several modeling workshops have been conducted with experts participating from ADF&G and NMFS, as well as independent experts from Washington, British Columbia and New Zealand. The golden king crab model was discussed in those workshops. The problems with the model remain and have not been resolved. A generic model is being developed, which would be applied to other crab fisheries first, and hopefully could be utilized in the golden king crab fishery in future years. It is unknown when a working model will be approved.

GHF/TAC and Alaska Board of Fisheries History:

In 1996 when ADF&G developed the GHF, it was set at 5.9 million pounds for both areas. At this time, the CPUE averaged 5-7 crab per pot and it was believed the GHF was at a reasonable level.

In 1998 due to Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements for overfishing limit definitions, the GHL was decreased by 200,000 pounds to 5.7 million pounds where it remained for ten years.

When the crab rationalization program began in 2005 and concerns about overharvesting of the TAC were no longer an issue, the TAC should have reverted back to the 5.9 million pounds, but it was not.

In 2008, the Alaska Board of Fisheries received several proposals to address the total allowable catch and it was increased it by 5% to 5.985 million pounds. This was intended to be a short term fix until the assessment model was approved.

In 2011, an Agenda Change Request was accepted by the Board for consideration of the TAC, and in March of 2012, the Board increased the TAC again by 5%.

CPUE History:

The Aleutian Islands golden king crab fishery has never failed to open since the first directed fishery began in 1981. In 2004 the department stated in their Annual Management Report that, "Recent fishery data also indicates that the stock is healthy." The CPUE averaged 11 crab that year and had been increasing for three years.

In 2005 the fishery became rationalized, and soak times increased. The CPUE jumped dramatically, and has continued to remain at historically high levels. The small mesh pot experiment proved that the claims harvesters were making in regard to a substantial number of small crab, along with females and pre-recruits, is correct.

Impacts to Harvesters and Communities:

An attempt to demonstrate some of the impacts of the Board's decision on this proposal are shown below:

- Approximately 50 families, represented by quota share holders, vessel owners, skippers, and crew members receive all or most of their income from this fishery.
- There are 65 Western Alaskan communities that derive financial benefit from the Aleutian Islands golden king crab fishery, resulting from royalty payments for the quota share and CDQ they control.
- The community of Adak receives a direct 10% allocation of golden king crab from the total allowable catch limits.
- The Aleutian #1, which harvests the largest amount of quota in the eastern Aleutians and a substantial amount in the western Aleutians, is 25% owned by the Bering Sea Women's Group, providing income for the shelter serving abuse victims from the villages in the Nome area.
- With a first wholesale value ranging from \$9.00 - \$11.00 per pound, foregone harvest can result in significant loss.

Fast Facts Regarding the Aleutian Islands Golden King Crab Fishery:

- The open area is over 800 miles long, about the same distance as it is from Seattle to San Francisco, with only about 20% of the area being harvested in any given year.
- It takes a boat 4-5 days to travel the entire distance without stopping.
- Five vessels currently harvest all of the crab for both eastern and western areas.
- The fishery has never failed to open and is considered one of the healthiest in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Requested Board of Fisheries Action:

The proposal placeholder request is for an increase of 15% to the TAC. The harvesters believe that the golden king crab fishery has been underutilized for many years and are attempting to achieve optimum yield, while maintaining conservation standards. With only a small portion of the available area being utilized each year for the harvest, we believe that adequate protections are in place, even in the event of an unlikely localized depletion issue.

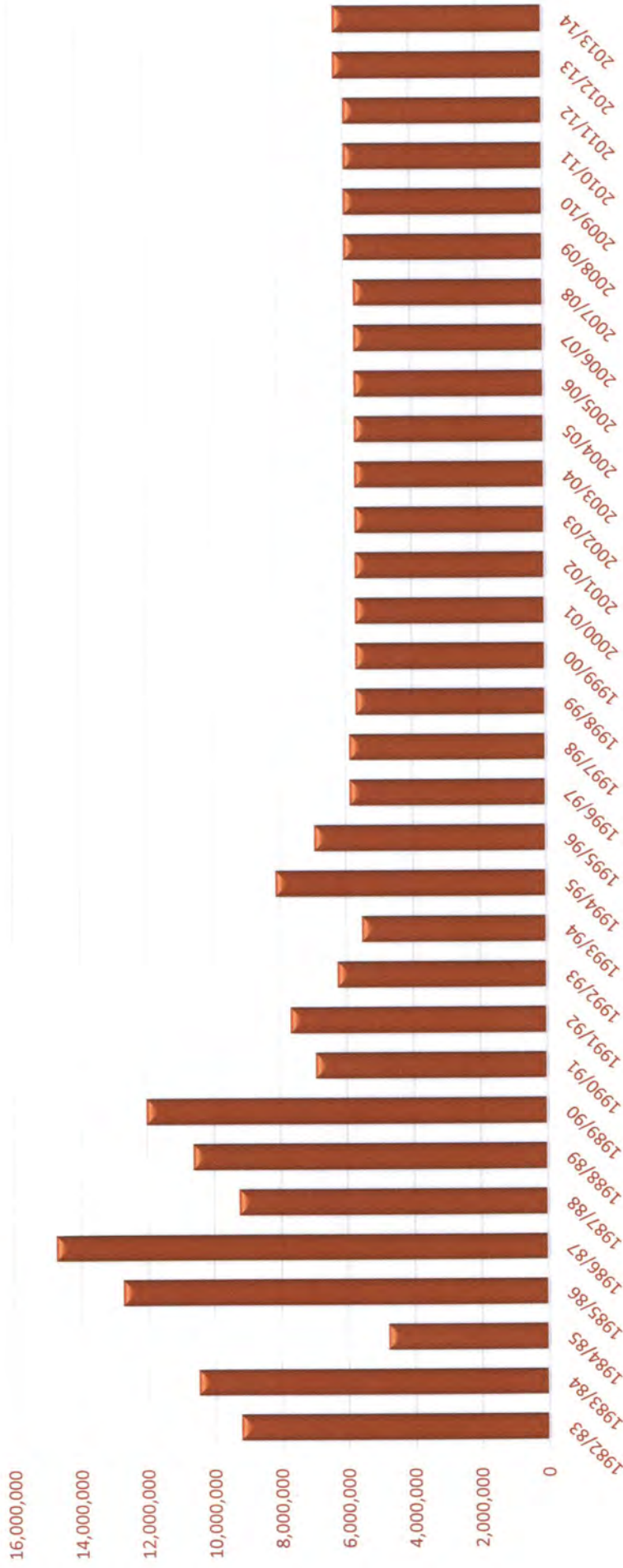
It is uncertain as to when a pot survey can be developed and industry has been informed that a minimum of five years of data is needed for stock assessment purposes. The model, which has been under review and development, but not approved for use, cannot be considered as a true indicator of stock status, in our view.

We are requesting the Board to once again consider raising the TAC for the Aleutian Islands golden king crab fishery.

ALEUTIAN ISLANDS GOLDEN KING CRAB FISHERY

Harvest & GHL/TAC History*

1982/83 - 2013/14



1996: Guideline Harvest set at 5.9 million pounds
 1998: Guideline Harvest set at 5.7 million pounds
 2008: TAC set at 5.985 million pounds
 2011: TAC set at 6.29 million pounds

Average unrestricted harvest 1982/83 – 1995/96: 8,965,296 pounds

NOTE: Harvest for the unrestricted fishery was dependent on levels of effort, which varied depending on price and other factors

*Data taken from the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab SAFE – April 2011, page 533, with remaining years added based on annual TAC