

**BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
CRAB OBSERVER OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE**

Date: September 30, 2022

To: Märit Carlson-Van Dort, Chair
Alaska Board of Fisheries

From: Linda Kozak and Jamie Goen, COOTF Co-Chairs

Subject: 2022 Report to the Alaska Board of Fisheries
With Recommendations

The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab Observer Oversight Task Force (COOTF) was formed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 1999 and consists of crab industry stakeholders and representatives. The COOTF is charged with interacting and acting in an advisory capacity to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G or Department), as well as report to and be advisory to the Board of Fisheries on issues relating to the state managed BSAI shellfish onboard observer program.

The purpose of the COOTF is to review and recommend specific action for all aspects of the BSAI crab observer program, including the following:

- Funding mechanisms for observers
- Budget and reserve priorities
- ADF&G suggested program receipt requests

The COOTF meets annually with ADF&G to review reports on the previous year's deployment of observers, along with budgeted and actual costs of the program. The COOTF also reviews and comments on Department recommendations for deployment and funding for the program through the test fish receipt authority.

The BSAI crab observer program is funded through Legislative approved test-fish funds and federal crab rationalization funds. Each of the BSAI crab fisheries has a percentage of coverage objective which provides the Department with necessary information to manage the fishery. In 2021, the Department conducted two test fisheries to help fund the observer program, with \$500,000 being received from the harvest and sale of Bristol Bay red king crab and \$300,000 from the Aleutian Islands golden king crab resource.

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In these challenging times of low crab abundance for important species of the Bering Sea, particularly with Bristol Bay red king crab, there may be a need to consider alternative ways to fund necessary observer coverage. While the traditional cost recovery/test fish program has been used for many years to fund onboard shellfish observers and some program costs, the ability to continue a cost recovery/test fish program may be limited with several crab species at historic low abundance levels. The members of the COOTF will be discussing this important issue and will work with the Department on funding options for the observer program.

COOTF Continuation and Membership Recommendations

There are three action items listed below which we are requesting the board approve. A continuation of the COOTF, reappointment of current members and the addition of three new members.

1. The members of the COOTF recommend and request consideration by the Alaska Board of Fisheries to approve the continuation of the Task Force.
2. The members further recommend the following individuals be reappointed for a term of three years.

Lance Farr
Linda Kozak
Craig Lowenberg
Jamie Goen
Jeff Stephan
Doug Wells
Paul Wilkins

3. Additionally, the COOTF membership recommends the addition of three members to be appointed for a term of three years.

Gabriel Prout
Joshua Songstad
Nikolai Sivertstol

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Some background information on the three nominees is shown below:

Gabriel Prout, 32 years old, has been involved in the fishing industry in Alaska since the age of 8. He has fished for halibut, pot cod, and Bering Sea red king, snow, and Bairdi crab. He is part owner in the 116' crab fishing vessel Silver Spray, as well as owner of CVO and CVC crab quotas. Currently, Gabriel fishes and works onboard the Silver Spray as his primary source of income and livelihood. He is an active participant and proponent of the BSAI crab fishery and is also a board member of the Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers trade group. As part of COOTF, he would give balance, good discussion, and objective ideas to the group.

Joshua Songstad is Captain of the fishing vessel Handler and a fourth generation Alaska Commercial fisherman. He has been fishing the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay for over 25 years and has a great love and respect for the work and the industry that supports its success. His knowledge, experience, and passion in the industry give him a strong stance in helping guide its successful path for future generations of both crab stocks and the people that rely on them.

Nikolai Sivertstol was born in the United States, but grew up in Norway where he began commercial fishing in his 20's. He has a bachelor's degree in Economics and Business Administration. In the 1990's he established a fishery consulting firm. Nikolai is a board member of the Inter-cooperative Exchange (ICE), Bering Sea Arbitration Organization, and Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers.

The Task Force has been very successful working in cooperation with the department for the past 23 years and we are grateful for the support and exchange of information provided by the department.

We believe our input and ideas have helped shape the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands shellfish observer program into a cost-efficient and effective program which provides valuable information for the management of the crab stocks of the BSAI.

Thank you for reviewing our report and recommendations.