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Date: September 19, 2023

To: Bil Homka, Marjorie Veeder, Patrica Soule, Estkarlen Magdaong, Michelle Price,

From: Frank Kelty, Fisheries Consultant

Re: Fishery Activities Memo, and Fishery Information Attachments

I attended the NPFMC Crab Plan Team meeting via zoom on Tuesday -Thursday last week. The focus of this meeting was to get the main Bering Sea Crab Fisheries Stock assessment for the NPFMC Science Statistical Committee review at the October NPFMC meeting so they can be approved by the Council before the start of the October 15, 2023, crab season.

Tuesday was spent on general crab items, most of the morning was spent on and over of the summer NOAA survey results in the Eastern Bering Sea Bristol Bay area and the Western and Northern areas of the Bering Sea. Not a lot of improvement was seen in the survey results on the main crab species Bristol Bay Red King Crab saw the females made the threshold level of 8.4 million crab to allow a fishery male abundance continues to decline about 20% the fishery is not overfished, but still not a lot of incoming recruitment moving in. Snow Crab survey showed a continued depressed fishery, in all areas, and this stock is at all time low levels for male and female animals. There was a strong sign of small crab requirement of very small animals seen in this year's survey that are three or four years out if they survive, which could get the fishery back on its feet. The Tanner crab survey is managed as on stock even though we have a Western and Eastern Bering Sea Districts. The Western district showed strong recruitment and improvement in the number of legal males, the Eastern district is still somewhat depressed with lack of incoming recruitment and a decline in legal male abundance. The Western District improvement is about the most positive area in this year's summer survey.

We then moved on to the Ecosystem status report, the report gave some positive signs of La Nina impact on the Bering Sea region seems to have weaken. The report points out some moderate cooler conditions in the Eastern Bering Sea shelf in 2023. Sea Surface temperatures were somewhat lower than average for the past few years and the cold pool increased in size in the Northern Bering Sea the ice thickness increased above St Matthew Island. Ice pack was somewhat larger but did reach St Paul Island for the ninth year out of ten. Ice pack melt was somewhat delayed in the spring due to colder weather in March and April. The overall ice pack size is still at a 55% overall decline in the Northern Region from it historical average. I have attached the Ecosystem Report with this memo for your review.

The Plan team moved on to the NOAA Economic Status of Crab Fisheries off Alaska. The economic report lays out the tremendous impacts to all sectors of the crab industry have faced with the collapse of all the major crab fisheries. The report targets production, values, earnings by harvesters, processors, labor cost, employment, quotas, and markets decline. The document lays out a report card on impacts to communities impacts on states that are involved in the fisheries. The report is included with this memo, and I hope you review it lays out in detail the economic impacts to all sectors on the collapse of the crab industry. An important issue they discussed was how to get more community impact information into this document, and how to work with community representatives to get those impacts for the Plan teams benefit and knowledge.

Late on Tuesday they review the SAFE report (Stock Assessment Fishery Evaluation) document for Pribilof Blue King Crab the fishery has been closed since 1998 the Blue King Crab fishery is still very depressed and has showed no improvement 25 years the Crab Plan Team OFL recommendation was 26,000 lbs. and the ABC recommendation was 19,000 lbs. the fishery will remained closed.

Bristol Bay Red King Crab assessment, started on Wednesday morning over all the fishery is still depressed and in a declining trend. The past two years male and female abundance has held steady. The Plan team is still concerned that the lack of recruitment \, this could continue stock decline with direct fishing pressures. The survey continues to show male abundance increasing for both male and females in the northern region. The BBRKC biomass was 36 million pounds, the OFL 9.74million pounds. the ABC at 7.80 million pounds with a 20% buffer. The best guess is we will have a directed fishery that a TAC hopefully in the 2.5-to-3.0-million-pound range, on October 15, 2023.

The Plan Team moved on to the Norton Sound Red King Crab discussion on the proposed models to use for that fishery. This is a fishery summer and winter ice fishery for the residents of that region.

Opilio Tanner (Snow Crab) this fishery, is in terrible shape the 2023 survey showed a continued decline in both females and male abundance. There is very little chance of a fishery this year. The only positive is a large cohort of small crab 3 to 4 years out was seen in the survey, hopefully they will survive and could get this fishery back on its feet. The Mature Male Biomass was estimated at 152,000 pounds the OFL at 68,000pounds and the ABC at 55,000lbs with a 20% buffer. The fishery will remain closed in 2023-2024.

Thursday morning the Plan Team moved on to the Tanner Bering Sea Tanner Crab Fishery Safe assessment. Recruitment into the fishery decline a bit from 1.5 million animals in 2022 to 1.4 million animals in 2023. A large portion of the recruitment came into the Western District, the Eastern district is still declining. The Mature Male Biomass (MMB) is at 107 million pounds the OFL is at 79 million pounds and the ABC is at 59

million pounds. We expect that we will have a directed Tanner Crab fishery in both districts. ADFG set TAC and they have issues with survey models on Tanners they don't buy the model analysis, so I expect a TAC in the 2–3-million-pound range I hope I'm wrong.

The BSFRF Executive Director Scott Goodman gave the Crab team an overview of the foundation tagging and crab survey in March with two crab vessels using pots and tagging BBRKC. It was very successful with almost 85% of the tags deployed we received data from that is under analysis. He also gave an overview on future tagging projects with pot vessels and trawlers possibly working together hopefully on Snow Crab populations.

The Plan team looked at overfishing updates on some of the smaller crab populations in fisheries such as Western Adak Red King Crab, Pribilof Golden King, and Pribilof Blue and Red King Crab, and St. Matthews Blue King Crab many of these fisheries haven't had a directed fishery for many years. They reviewed the status determination.

At the end of Thursday, the Plan team worked on their minutes for the North Pacific Council SSC panel for the October meeting.

Friday morning the BSFRF and Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Group put on a 4-hour crab research symposium in Ballard I listen in on zoom. They had 70 people in person and 50 people on zoom, it was the best turnout in years for the symposium. The group had panelists from NOAA, ADFG, ABSC, and the BSFRF. The harvesters attending really had a lot of questions on ADFG TAC setting process, they shared their concerns on the economic concerns they are facing and want ADFG to help get the crab season open if possible. We also had good information on Habitat and Ecosystem from the NOAA presentations.

Regards

Frank Kelty

Attachments:

1. Fishery Activity Memo
2. NPFMC Crab Plan Team BBRKC Assessment
3. NPFMC Crab Plan Team Snow Crab Assessment
4. NPFMC Crab Plan Team Tanner Crab Assessment
5. NPFMC Crab Plan Team Ecosystem Status Report
6. NPFMC Crab Plan Team Economic Status of Fisheries
7. BSFRF and Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers Crab Science Symposium Agenda