

Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force Recommendations Progress Report - Spring 2024

This report addresses the following Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force Recommendations:

- Six State engagement recommendations
- Three general research recommendations
- Management recommendations

STATE ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: Establish a process for providing bycatch-related information and resources that is understandable and easily accessible.

Progress:

1. *Continued development of a bycatch website to provide upcoming meeting information, presentations and links to sites of interest.*
2. *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are being developed for bycatch website.*
3. *Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC) virtual meetings provided presentations on how to access bycatch information at the NPRMC, NMFS and state levels, as well as updates on state engagement, research and management actions.*
4. *BAC meetings will provide updates on ABRT recommendations and other bycatch information.*

Recommendation: Offer the public an opportunity to provide input on NPFMC issues before each NPFMC meeting.

Progress:

1. *State officials meet virtually and in person with Alaskan stakeholders before each NPFMC meeting.*
2. *Deputy Commissioner attends Bycatch Advisory Council meetings and testimony is taken at each meeting on bycatch issues.*
3. *ADF&G Commissioner initiated a series of townhall meetings on bycatch.*

Recommendation: Create a permanent bycatch advisory entity.

Progress: ADF&G Commissioner established the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council in 2023 and made it effective for three years. Council will meet three-four times per year and provide reports to the Commissioner on recommendations and progress. Presentations and information will be provided via the State of Alaska BAC website. A link is shown below:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=bycatchtaskforce.meetinginfo>

Recommendation: Support legislative action to remove the sunset of the Education Tax Credit Program and expand to allow for gear modification or technology improvements that help reduce bycatch.

Progress: The Alaska State Legislature is reviewing this action. House Bill 144 is currently in House Finance and Senate Bill 120 is in Senate Finance. It is anticipated this legislation will be addressed and finalized in the 2024 legislative session.

Recommendation: Work with other entities to improve information on the bycatch of Chinook and chum salmon taken in Russian domestic fisheries.

Progress: The State of Alaska continues to urge the State Department to provide accountability through observers or other means to determine Chinook and chum take by Russian vessels.

Recommendation: Develop a State of Alaska Bycatch Policy.

Progress: This issue has not yet been addressed.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

NOTE: A detailed report on research recommendations is included in the final ABRT report available for review at the following link:

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/abrt_final_report.pdf

General Recommendations for Process in Developing Research Priorities:

1. Develop state bycatch research priorities, utilizing input from communities, Alaska Native tribes, industry, and the public, to share with funding entities that would help identify and acquire research funds.
2. Implement strategies to encourage and facilitate industry/agency cooperative research to reduce bycatch and associated mortality.
3. Create methods for collaboration with Alaska Native tribes, organizations and other research entities to better track proposed or funded bycatch research, along with developing opportunities for cooperative projects and combined reporting of findings.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: The State of Alaska should support taking incremental measures through the regulatory process to improve bycatch utilization with a particular focus on species that are otherwise marketable but are caught with non-targeted gear, or discards in a directed fishery that are required by regulation.

Progress:

1. *The Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council established a working group to investigate the logistical, regulatory, economic, and political issues that would need to be addressed. The subcommittee met four times and the link to the report is shown below:*

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/bycatchtaskforce/041624_abac_report.pdf

2. *The North Pacific Fishery Management Council addressed maximum retainable amount (MRA) adjustments at the April 2024 meeting. The proposed action could reduce regulatory discards. A Purpose and Need statement, along with alternatives for analysis were approved by the Council. A link to the motion is shown below:*

<https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=b84ec922-2b29-4375-801d-b31e621ee964.pdf&fileName=D2%20Motion.pdf>

Management Recommendations Where Action Has Been Initiated

GULF OF ALASKA

Recommendation: Review the open and closed areas in the Gulf of Alaska for pelagic and non-pelagic trawl gear and consider closing new/additional areas to reduce the bycatch of halibut, salmon and Tanner crab.

Progress: *NPFMC initiated a discussion paper to review protective action for Tanner crab in the Kodiak area which was reviewed at the December NPFMC meeting. An expanded discussion paper is scheduled for review in October 2024.*

Recommendation: Address the lack of monitoring in the directed Tanner crab and state waters pot cod fisheries.

Progress: *The State of Alaska introduced legislation to allow for the use of electronic monitoring on vessels fishing in state managed fisheries. This action is currently under committee review in the Alaska State Legislature.*

Recommendation: It is recommended that a regulatory requirement be approved for the Gulf of Alaska pelagic trawl fleet, including any tenders of pelagic trawl caught fish, to have 100% electronic monitoring. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work with National Marine Fisheries Service, our federal delegation, and others to work to acquire funding to install electronic monitoring equipment on all GOA catchers and tenders.

Progress: A Proposed Rule was published in the Federal Register on January 21, 2024 to expand electronic monitoring for pelagic pollock catcher vessels and tenders delivering to shoreside processors or stationary floating processors in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

BERING SEA

Recommendation: Evaluate possible seasonal closures in hot spot areas for pot gear both inside and outside of state managed waters.

Recommendation: Review effectiveness of fixed open and closed areas for trawling and continue to examine methods to develop flexible spatial management.

Progress: NPFMC initiated an analysis to consider closures of the red king crab savings area for federally managed trawl and fixed gear. This was reviewed at the February 2024 NPFMC meeting and no direct action was taken. The Council motion stated the intent to use inseason information and ongoing research projects to develop framework agreements for dynamic closures and crab avoidance measures for trawl, pot and hook-and-line sectors. A discussion paper was requested to inform options for incentivizing trawl gear innovation.

Recommendation: Evaluate the observer coverage and monitoring for the directed crab and pot cod fisheries.

Progress: The State of Alaska introduced legislation to allow for the use of electronic monitoring in state managed fisheries, which could enhance coverage for these fisheries. This legislation is being reviewed by the Alaska State Legislature.

Recommendation: Consider a rationalization program for the 60' and greater pot cod vessels as a way to manage bycatch and examine prohibited species caps as part of a rationalization program.

Progress: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering a cooperative type of a rationalization program for this fleet. A discussion paper is scheduled for the June 2024 meeting.

Recommendation: The State should work to achieve real time genetic reporting that provides the composition of Western Alaska salmon in the bycatch. This can then be used in management of the pollock fishery to avoid areas and times when Western Alaska salmon are on the grounds in the Bering Sea.

Progress: Industry and various agency research continues to work on the development of real time genetic reporting.

Recommendation: Establish a scientific-based chum salmon cap to reduce bycatch in the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea.

Progress:

- 1. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council initiated an analysis on development of a chum cap at the April 2023 meeting.*
- 2. In October 2023 the NPFMC reviewed a preliminary analysis and refined alternatives for review.*
- 3. A further review was conducted at the April 2024 NPFMC meeting and additional analysis is being conducted.*
- 4. Future action may be taken in February 2025 and other meetings in 2025. A link to the NPFMC notice on this subject is shown below:*

<https://www.npfmc.org/chum-salmon-bycatch-press-release/>

Management Recommendations Where Action Has *NOT* Been Initiated

GULF OF ALASKA

Recommendation: Following gear modification research, consider regulations for the directed crab fishery and pot cod fishery to reduce incidental take and discard mortality.

Recommendation: To better quantify removals of prohibited species, it is recommended that trawl catcher vessels in the Gulf of Alaska be required to have 100% observer coverage when engaged in non-pelagic trawling. It is further recommended that the State of Alaska work to obtain funding, either through specific appropriations and/or grants for the additional coverage.

Recommendation: It is recommended the State of Alaska propose that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council consider development of an abundance-based management program for halibut bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska as a way to address bycatch during fluctuations of halibut biomass.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State of Alaska investigate the value of requiring full retention of Tanner crab in all GOA trawl fisheries for a period of time to adequately assess removals.

Recommendation: As a means of reducing and managing bycatch and associated mortality of high value species within the Gulf of Alaska, it is recommended that rationalization-type management tools be considered.

BERING SEA

Recommendation: Examine the impact of retaining all legal crab in the directed crab fishery and counting toward IFQ.

Recommendation: A review is recommended for the Bering Sea trawl area prohibited species caps (PSC) in relation to crab to be supported by the State of Alaska. This review would examine the impacts to the resource and trawl sector if trawl crab PSC were to be applied across the entire Bering Sea area, instead of only the current sub-areas.