

# Displaced crab skipper wants rationalization to work

Oystein Lone didn't fish for crab last fall, and that — in itself — is news.

For 18 years straight, he fished crab out of Dutch Harbor, rising from a greenhorn to become the captain on various vessels in the fleet.

But today, he's changed the focus of his fishing, yet remains thoughtful about the jarring changes the crab fleet has endured in the past two years.

He's not alone. Other skippers and deckhands are reflecting on the rationalization program because it will be up for review this spring.

When crabbing got skinny in 2001, Lone went back to school, upgraded his license, and began skippering in the factory longline fleet, most recently on the F/V *Glacier Bay*. But he continued to crab, running boats and sometimes signing on as a deckhand.

When rationalization appeared, he took captain/crew shares in the king crab fishery and the snow crab fishery, and he has purchased some more to build the investment. He and his shares fished on the F/V *Scandies Rose* the last couple of years.

Last time he was in Dutch, Lone talked with a lot of captains in the crab fleet.

"It seemed nobody is actively looking out for the interests of the crew and captain shares. So many people have left the industry, I figured I'd better get involved.

"There are a few things we, as catcher vessel share owners, have to take into consideration as the review of the crab program is coming in April of 2007. If we don't get active on the decision-making, believe me, the processors and A share owners will be happy to."

**H**ere are some of the issues Lone said fellow share owners must understand:

**The split:** The 90/10 split would require 90 percent of a share's catch to be delivered to a specific processor.

"Do we go to this program that ties us to certain processors? I say no, because the shares are so small that it will not make any sense.

"For example, if I have a 1,500-pound quota tied to a processor in King Cove, but the boat fishing my quota delivers to Dutch or Akutan, it's not going to make a trip down there to deliver my 1,500 pounds. It's

not cost-effective. The quotas between crew and captains are so small that it makes sense to allow their catches deliverable anywhere."

**Skippers onboard:** "We need to look at whether the captain must be on board the vessel fishing his quota, as of the 2008 season.

"The problem with this is that the crab fleet is still consolidating. This leaves a lot of IFQ on the beach. If we make it mandatory to be on board to fish the captain shares, then there will be a lot more good deckhands out of work.

"My idea is to give it some more time. Let's have another three-year extension on the current program. This will give the fleet time to consolidate more. Also, the skipper crew shares also will consolidate.

"One solution would be to allow the co-op shares to stay in the co-op, but they won't require skippers to fish their shares. Only non-co-op shares would have to be fished by the skipper-owner.

"If captains have to fish their own shares, you'll have a bunch of middle-aged guys doing work best suited to 24-year-olds — guys who, in earlier generations, might have become crab skippers."

**Loans:** "Where is the loan program for crew and captains to buy shares? Now, most deckhands and many captains can't afford to buy quota. The reason is that they've taken huge pay cuts. So, rationalization, which supposedly allowed deckhands to buy shares, made it impossible to do so, because rationalization cut the pay of the people who were supposed to buy quota."

Lending programs have worked in other areas and other fisheries, Lone says.

**The 2 percent owner cap:** "Do we look at increasing this? Currently, you can be issued up to 1 percent and you can buy up to 2 percent. Do we raise this to 3 percent or 4 percent? This would help consolidate the quota, because there are not that many vessels operating anymore."

**Captains' shares:** Today, the shares can be assigned to any boat, and they are not tied to processor shares.

"I think it needs to stay that way, but



A younger Oystein Lone is shown in 1998 during an opilio opening. These days, he spends most of his time captaining longliners, like the F/V *Glacier Bay*, in Alaskan waters.

I don't see many guys too interested. It's something we have to fight to keep.

"In one case, captains' shares were pancaked on F/V *Controller Bay* last year, and the vessel made its delivery in Sitka, evading the Akutan-Dutch-King Cove monopoly. Wouldn't it be great if we could do more of this in the future — to bring some true competition in the marketplace?

"Not in the minds of some in this industry."

These relatively small, entirely mobile, shares don't fit neatly into the rationalized system. To some, especially the processors, it's just too irrational, Lone says, and processors will want them taken away.

Overall, Lone believes it's far too late for complaining about the rationalization program. It's a done deal — at least for now.

"We just can't go back and make huge changes in the system. We have to give it three or four years to see if it's working. If it doesn't work by then, then we should try something else," he says.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council will begin its 16-month review of the Bering Sea-Aleutian Island crab rationalization program in April. Lone intends to attend the April meeting, and would like to hear from other captains and crew. You can reach him at [Lone.fam@verizon.net](mailto:Lone.fam@verizon.net).

In the meantime, if you have an opinion on the crab rationalization review, let us know at [Pacific Fishing: editor@pacificfishing.com](mailto:editor@pacificfishing.com). We, of course, will be covering the meeting. ■