



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Crabbers applaud relief funds, and look for leadership on crab and habitat conservation to avoid future disasters**

When your whole business and community relies on a renewable natural resource that disappears, how do you move forward? First, you reach out for immediate financial relief to weather the crisis. Then, you figure out what needs to be done to bring the resource back. Finally, you start figuring out how to diversify and adapt as fast as possible.

Alaska's Bering Sea crab fishermen and crab-dependent fishing communities are doing just that, while still working through the initial shock and grief that comes with loss.

We very much appreciate the positive progress Congress and the government have made over the past week to provide financial relief and we know the work has just begun to rebuild the crab resource. It's going to take leadership and change to accomplish it.

Last week, the Secretary of Commerce declared several fisheries disasters, an important step forward for Bering Sea crab and for many other fisheries in Alaska and Washington where fishermen and fishing communities have suffered from recent disasters. We applaud the Secretary and NOAA Fisheries for working to speed up the fishery disaster process and appreciate those efforts. This week, Congress acted swiftly to include funds for fishery disasters in the omnibus appropriations bill to help America's fishermen and coastal communities survive these crises and also fund research to help avoid them in the future. Thank you to Senators Murkowski, Sullivan, Murray, and Cantwell, as well as Representative Peltola, for their leadership in these efforts.

"The \$300M included in the omnibus appropriation package for fishery disasters is a great start for much-needed money to help fishermen and communities pay their bills," said Jamie Goen, Executive Director for Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers. "We commend the Secretary of Commerce, NOAA Fisheries, and members of Congress, particularly the Alaska and Washington delegations, for their swift action and attention to this issue affecting so many hard-working Americans and family fishing businesses."

For Alaska's Bering Sea crab fisheries, the speed that this recent disaster was both declared and funded is refreshing in a process that often takes 2-4 years before money reaches fishermen. These first steps in the process happened in a record time of only 2 months! This is truly an incredible effort and very appreciated. Crabbers are hopeful the forward progress with

government agencies to streamline and speed up the various stages of this process will continue in order to get financial relief distributed quickly to those fishermen, processors, and communities in need.

While crabbers and crab-dependent communities seek financial relief in the short-term to survive the crisis, we are also doing everything we can to bring the crab resource back through added conservation measures. Our goal is to do this in a way that keeps every other sector fishing their full allocations while giving crab stocks a chance to rebuild.

Crabbers are leading the way toward a more holistic, adaptive, ecosystem-based approach to management in the Bering Sea. This approach uses the science and data we have available to be proactive in helping the crab stocks rebuild and protecting the habitat they need. Our recent emergency petition is in front of the Secretary of Commerce for a decision. It would create a temporary, discreet area closed to all fishing gears from January through June 2023, a time when crab are in vulnerable soft shell state of molting and mating, in an area known to be important to Bristol Bay red king crab and their habitat. The request has garnered a groundswell of public and political support, including letters of support from The House Committee on Natural Resources through the leadership of Representative Peltola, the Alaska state legislature, tribal governments, and mayors in Alaska. It's rare that so many politicians weigh in on fisheries management actions, and we appreciate their support for conservation measures to help Alaska crab stocks rebuild.

At the same time the government is working hard to provide financial relief from these fisheries disasters, they also need to be working hard on management actions to reduce the likelihood of future fishery disasters. And those need to be implemented now to help our ecosystem and the people who rely on it recover. Crabbers are hopeful the Secretary will approve this emergency action request as a first step in conservation measures to help Bering Sea crab stocks.

Finally, Congress and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are providing a pulse of funding for urgent crab research. We're encouraged by how the crab industry, communities, and state and federal scientists are coming together to get additional research going as quickly as possible. Senator Murkowski and Alaska Commissioner Vincent-Lang are credited with making this research funding happen to support additional research starting as early as March 2023. We've heard from scientists that climate change, ocean warming, and ocean acidification effects are likely to continue to grow in magnitude and frequency, creating more uncertainty in fisheries management. Luckily, most crab stocks are resilient and can adapt if given a chance. We have to give them a chance, by protecting habitat and immediately reducing fishing impacts on the stock. It's time to use the data we already have to implement conservation measures while we continue to do research and adapt our management, as needed. It's also time to look at how our fisheries in Alaska can better diversify to adapt to growing changes and fishery collapses.

With this 3-prong approach of immediate financial relief, added conservation measures, and continued research, Alaska's crab stocks will recover, and our fishermen and fishing communities along with it.

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The Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers is a trade association representing independent crab harvesters who commercially fish for king, snow (opilio), and bairdi (Tanner) crab with environmentally friendly pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program. There are approximately 60 vessels and 350 fishermen that participate in the fisheries, including communities around the Bering Sea, Kodiak, Anchorage, Homer, and the Pacific Northwest.

For questions, please contact Jamie Goen, Executive Director of Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, at [jamie@alaskacrabbers.org](mailto:jamie@alaskacrabbers.org) or 206-417-3990.

For photos, see the following Dropbox folder and please site photographers listed in image title: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/03g1d9nm4hwcuqe/AABXgTPN0O5zyaMrAhkz05Dfa?dl=0>