



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Crabbers Call for Action to bring Alaska's Crab Fisheries Back

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council meets October 6 to decide on the status of Bering Sea crab stocks and federal harvest controls. The outlook from the scientists is downright troubling for the iconic Bristol Bay red king crab and for Bering Sea snow crab, also called opilio.

Alaska's Bering Sea crab fishermen are bracing for over a \$200M hit to harvesters if recommendations from scientists are adopted by decision-makers this week. And that numbers grows once you consider impacts to processors, communities, and on up the supply chain. The Bristol Bay red king crab fishery will be closed this fall for the first time in over 25 years and the Bering Sea snow crab fishery may be reduced by around 80%.

The Bering Sea crab fleet and the fishing communities around Alaska and the Pacific Northwest are bracing for a devastating blow to their industry and crabbers are calling for new conservation efforts.

In their [letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council](#), the body responsible for federal management oversight of crab fisheries in partnership with the state's Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers call for immediate action to expand a closed area in Bristol Bay to protect red king crab that shifted north according to the NOAA Fisheries summer trawl survey.

*"Based on what we've heard from the science, we were just a few dozen female crab away from having a directed fishery based on survey numbers. We need to protect those females so they rebound. Our directed fishery targets males only and that population was up from last year. We understand we must be closed when females are at low numbers to protect the stock as a whole and keep it sustainable. What we are proposing with an emergency closed area and requested voluntary industry actions from all fishing sectors should help crab stocks rebound and hopefully allow us to have a fishery next year."* said Jamie Goen, Executive Director for Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers.

Crabbers are asking that all sectors, including their own, reduce fishing impacts on crab through several voluntary industry actions. *"We have reached out to representatives from all sectors requesting that they avoid crab closed areas, improve their hotspot reporting alerting other fishermen on areas of crab to avoid, and use best handling practices to reduce crab mortality by limiting the amount of time crab are on deck and by gently returning them to the water."* Goen said.

In directed crab fisheries, crabbers plan to also explore increased mesh sizes and soak times to reduce catch of small crab and hotspot reporting to avoid areas of higher female abundance. Crabbers are working with other pot fisheries, such as pot cod, to reduce crab bycatch through gear design work under a NOAA Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program grant looking at different tunnel and ramp designs on pots to keep crab out while letting cod in.

We're looking to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries to take action quickly to implement conservation measures to protect important areas for crab, such as the high abundance areas for Bristol Bay red king crab, and for the longer-term, to create meaningful incentives to reduce crab bycatch in other fishing sectors, to reduce fishing impacts on molting and mating crab, and to estimate unaccounted for bycatch from unobserved fishing mortality from bottom and pelagic trawl nets, as well as pot and longline gears.

Alaska's Bering Sea crab stocks have the potential to recover back to levels to support a directed fishery, but we must all do our part and take action now.

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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 Tanner (bairdi) 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.