



**2021 Board of Fisheries Work Session
North Pacific Fishery Management Council Update
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October 20, 2021**

This report reflects actions taken by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) since the 2020 Board of Fisheries Work Session and Council actions currently under development. Information in this report is referenced from Council documents available at: www.npfmc.org

Crab

Harvest specifications: In October 2021, the Council established the annual harvest specifications for the Bristol Bay red king crab, Bering Sea Tanner crab, and Bering Sea snow crab. Federal harvest specifications include setting an annual Overfishing Limit (OFL) and an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limit. Under the cooperative State/Federal structure of the crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP), the State is responsible for setting the annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limit such that all crab removals remain below the ABC.

The 2021 Bering Sea trawl survey occurred as scheduled in both the Eastern Bering Sea and Northern Bering Sea. For Bristol Bay red king crab, mature female abundance declined by 25% and was estimated to be below the regulatory threshold¹ for opening a fishery. Mature male abundance increased 26% compared to the 2019 survey estimate.

Bering Sea Tanner crab mature male abundance decreased over 20% in 2021 compared to 2019 in areas both east and west of 166°W. Estimate mature male biomass in the eastern Bering Sea area remains below thresholds required for a fishery opening, the western Bering Sea area will open on October 15, 2021.

Snow crab abundance of all size and sex classes were down from the 2019 survey estimates. Legal male abundance declined by 69% from the 2019 estimate and mature male abundance fell below the federal minimum stock size threshold and is pending an overfished determination by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Once an overfished determination is made, the Council has two years to implement a rebuilding plan. The 2021/22 fishery will open on October 15, 2021.

	OFL (mlb)	ABC (mlb)	TAC (mlb)
Bristol Bay red king crab	4.9	3.9	closed
Bering Sea Tanner crab	59.9	47.9	closed east / 1.1 west
Bering Sea snow crab	16.5	12.4	5.6

The OFL/ABC are set by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and adopted by the Council. ADF&G sets the TAC.

¹ 5 AAC 34.816 (a)(1). The threshold level of abundance is 8,400,000 mature female red king crab...

Groundfish

BSAI Pacific cod catcher vessel management: In October 2021, the Council took final action to recommend a cooperative style rationalization program for the BSAI Pacific cod trawl catcher vessel (CV) fishery. The purpose of this action is to improve the prosecution of this overcapitalized fishery with the intent of promoting safety and stability in the harvesting and processing sectors, increasing the value of the fishery, providing for the sustained participation of fishery-dependent communities, minimizing bycatch to the extent practicable, and ensuring the sustainability and viability of the resource.

The proposed program allocates harvest quota share (QS) based on the harvest of targeted BSAI Pacific cod during the qualifying years. The Council also allocated 22.5% of the total harvest QS to processors with processing history in the fishery. The allocation to processors is intended to recognize processor investments in and dependence on the fishery as well as current and historical participation of fishing communities with shoreside processing plants that participate in the fishery.

To participate in the rationalized Pacific cod fishery, holders of qualified trawl CV licenses must join a voluntary cooperative, composed of at least three eligible licenses, annually in association with a licensed processor, to harvest trawl catcher vessel allocations of Pacific cod. Processors do not have to hold QS to receive deliveries from the rationalized fishery. Cooperatives will be annually issued cooperative quota based on the total amount of QS assigned to its members. All vessels harvesting cooperative quota will be in the full coverage observer program, which includes 100% observer.

In anticipation of improved bycatch management under a rationalization program, the Council included reductions in the halibut and crab bycatch limits for the fishery. The halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limit was reduced by 25% and the crab PSC limits were reduced by 35%.

The Council included provisions to promote sustained participation of Aleutian Islands processors and communities, including setting-aside 12% of the federal BSAI trawl catcher vessel A season harvest amount for delivery to a shore plant in the Aleutian Islands management region, which would benefit shore-based processors in Adak and possibly Atka if there are operating plants in the future. The Council also limited spillover effects from the BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV rationalization program on the groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska by reducing the sideboard limits for vessels that receive QS under the program. The revised sideboards further limit the amount of groundfish fishing activity that qualified vessels can harvest in the Gulf of Alaska and prevent participants in a rationalized fishery from negatively impacting participants in unrationalized Gulf of Alaska fisheries.

Halibut

BSAI Halibut Abundance Based Management of bycatch limits: In December 2021 the Council is scheduled to take final action to index the Amendment 80 sector's Pacific halibut bycatch limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries to halibut abundance. The Amendment 80 sector includes trawl catcher processor vessels in the BSAI that target groundfish species other than pollock. Currently halibut bycatch limits for groundfish fisheries are set in the BSAI Groundfish Fishery Management Plan at a fixed amount of halibut mortality, in metric tons. When BSAI halibut abundance declines, halibut bycatch becomes a larger proportion of total halibut removals and

can result in lower catch limits for directed halibut fisheries, particularly in halibut management Area 4CDE. While other groundfish sectors are also subject to bycatch limits, this action is limited to the Amendment 80 sector as that sector is responsible for the majority of BSAI halibut mortality in the BSAI groundfish fisheries.

Both the Council and the International Pacific Halibut Commission have expressed concern about impacts on directed halibut fisheries under the status quo and identified abundance-based halibut bycatch limits as a potential management approach to address these concerns. The Council intends to establish an abundance-based halibut bycatch management program in the BSAI for the Amendment 80 sector that meets the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, particularly to minimize halibut bycatch to the extent practicable under National Standard 9 and to achieve optimum yield in the BSAI groundfish fisheries on a continuing basis under National Standard 1. In addition to linking the Amendment 80 sector bycatch limit to halibut abundance the Council intends to develop a program that provides incentives for the fleet to minimize halibut mortality at all times. This action could also promote conservation of the halibut stock and may provide additional opportunities for the directed halibut fishery.

Salmon

Salmon Fishery Management Plan for Cook Inlet: The Council initiated a Cook Inlet salmon action in 2017 in response to a Ninth Circuit Court finding that a 2012 Salmon Fishery Management Plan (FMP) amendment was not in compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). The Court found the amendment improperly removed from the FMP three traditional salmon net fisheries requiring conservation and management that overlap with portions of federal jurisdictional waters. The Court ruled that the Council cannot delegate management of the fishery in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ or Federal waters) to the State by omitting it from the FMP, which required the Council to take action on another FMP amendment. The Court ruled in response to litigation by the United Cook Inlet Drift Association and Cook Inlet Fishermen's Fund supporting federal management in Cook Inlet.

In December 2020, the Council recommended amending the Salmon FMP to include the EEZ of Cook Inlet and recommended extending the FMP's existing West Area prohibition on commercial salmon fishing to the Cook Inlet EEZ. The revised FMP and regulations are expected to be effective for the 2022 season.

Stakeholders, the Council, NMFS, and ADF&G struggled to find workable solutions that complied with the Federal court order and MSA provisions. After considering the proposed federal oversight process under the delegated management option, the State determined that it is unwilling to accept delegated management of the Cook Inlet EEZ under the process required by NMFS. Delegated management would have imposed additional costs and burdens on ADF&G without benefitting management of Upper Cook Inlet salmon stocks. Establishing a separate annual management and oversight process only for the EEZ had the potential to negatively impact management of salmon fisheries in state waters and all user groups that participate in those fisheries.

The State informed the Council that allowing federal oversight of mixed stock salmon fisheries has the potential to significantly impact fisheries in state waters because the EEZ harvests are

first-in-line mixed stock fisheries. It could also potentially result in allocation shifts to already fully allocated fisheries in Cook Inlet or impact the current management plans designed to protect weak or recovering stocks. Finally, it could shift allocation battles to the Council process and usurp the authority of the State and Board of Fisheries and create even more complexity for both managers and users navigating dual, and possibly opposing, state and federal regulatory processes.

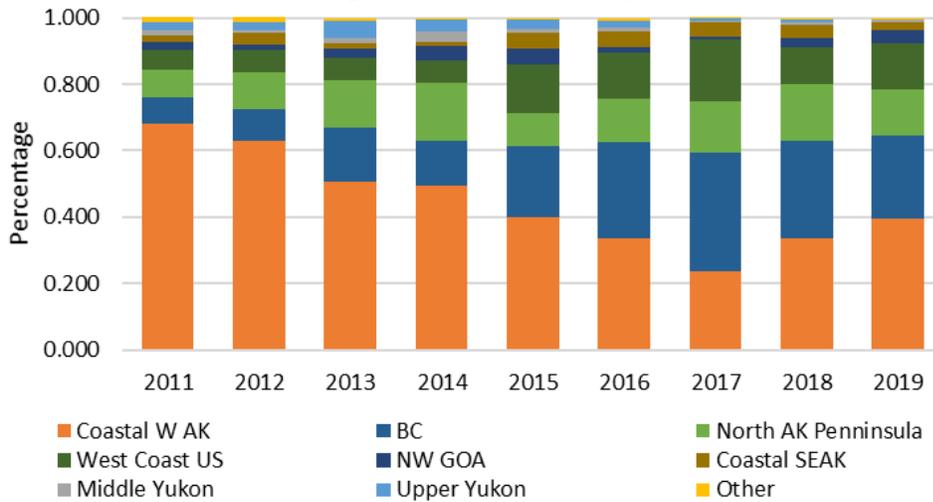
The Council determined that closing the Cook Inlet EEZ was preferable to separate federal management of the Cook Inlet EEZ because it was more likely to achieve the salmon conservation and management objectives established by the Council for the Upper Cook Inlet salmon fisheries in federal waters. Separate federal management would not have been as flexible and timely as State management and would not have been able to respond quickly if run sizes were substantially higher or lower than the preseason forecasts. The State's responsive process is particularly important because Upper Cook Inlet fisheries include mixed salmon stocks and require close tracking of salmon returns and adjust fishery management measures to prevent overfishing on weak stocks.

In amending the salmon FMP, the Council continued to recognize the State's long-standing expertise and infrastructure for salmon management and the fact that the State has been adequately managing the salmon fisheries in Alaska since Statehood.

Salmon bycatch in the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries: The Council receives annual salmon genetic stock composition reports from samples of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch taken in Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska fisheries. Chinook salmon samples are taken in the BSAI and GOA pollock trawl fisheries and the GOA rockfish and non-pollock trawl fisheries. Chum samples are taken in the BSAI pollock trawl fishery and GOA groundfish fisheries. These reports are available approximately 15 months following the fishing season when the samples were collected. In April 2021, the Council received genetic reports from samples taken in 2019. The Council also receives annual reports from the pollock fishery cooperatives on their performance under the Council's salmon bycatch management program.

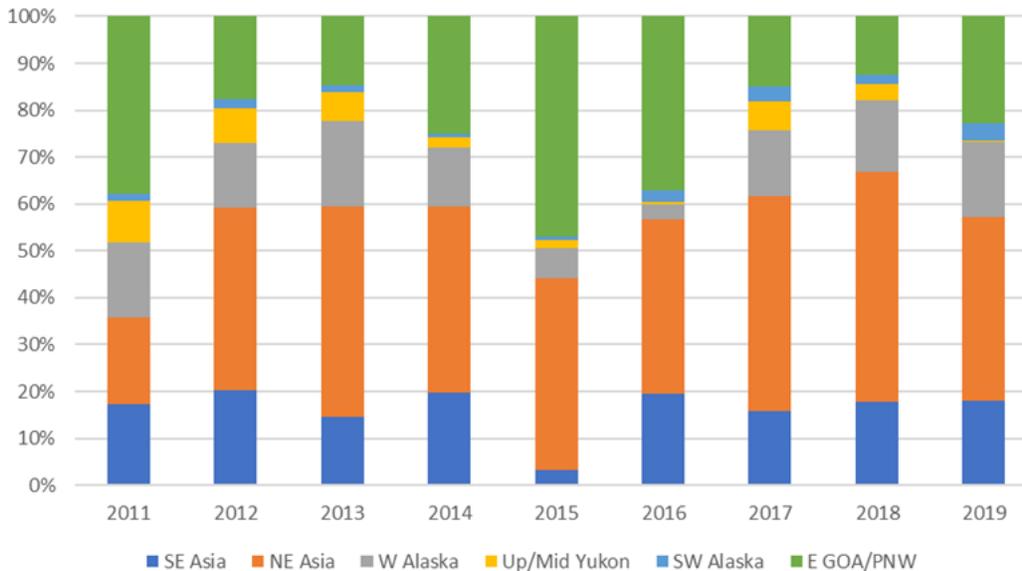
Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery - In 2019, Coastal Western Alaska stocks again made up the largest contribution of Chinook bycatch samples in the BSAI pollock trawl fishery at 40%, followed by British Columbia at 25%, North Alaska Peninsula at 14%, West Coast US at 14%, NW GOA at 4%, Coastal Southeast Alaska at 2%, Middle Yukon at 0.5%, Upper Yukon at 0.4%, and Russia at 0.2%. Coastal Western Alaska stocks had been declining as a percentage of the stock composition from 2011 to 2017 but their contribution to the stock composition increased again in 2018 and 2019. The reverse was true for British Columbia stocks with their contribution to the stock composition decreasing in 2018 and 2019.

Bering Sea Chinook salmon bycatch genetic stock composition



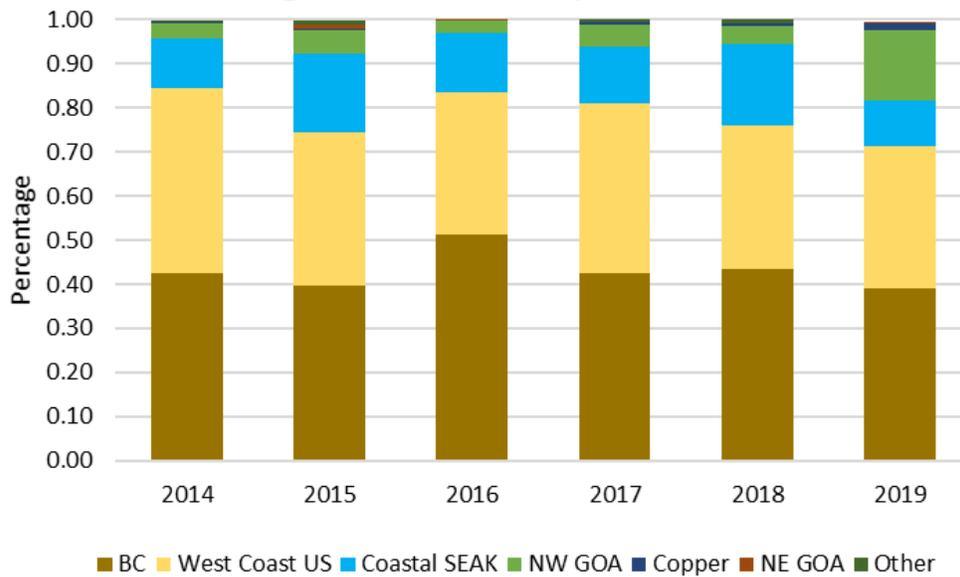
Chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery – Nearly all chum salmon bycatch occurs during the pollock B-season (June – November). Typically, about 60% of the chum salmon caught in the pollock trawl fishery are of Asian origin. The 2019 stock composition was consistent with recent years at 39% NE Asian, 23% Eastern Gulf of Alaska/Pacific NW, 18% SE Asian, 16% Western Alaska, 4% SW Alaskan, and <1% Upper/Middle Yukon River.

Chum Genetic Stock Composition Bering Sea Pollock Trawl



Chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries – Typically, over 70% of the Chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries is comprised of stocks from British Columbia and the US West Coast. In 2019, British Columbia and US West Coast stocks again comprised the majority of samples, but GOA stocks increased from less than 5% across all years from 2014-2018 to 16% in 2019.

Gulf of Alaska Chinook salmon bycatch genetic stock composition



At the October 2021 meeting, the Council requested an updated bycatch impact analysis which includes current genetic stock identification information and an updated age/length composition for Chinook salmon along with estimates of how many Chinook salmon taken as bycatch would have returned to Western Alaska Chinook salmon stock groupings. The last time the Council received an updated report on the impacts of Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery on western Alaskan Chinook stocks was in 2018. The analysis determined that the estimated impact remained at less than 2.5% for Coastal Western Alaska and less than 1% for upper Yukon River stocks. In the time since that report, the three-system index of in-river Chinook salmon, which the Council uses to reduce the Chinook salmon bycatch limit for the pollock trawl fishery, has been below the low Chinook salmon abundance threshold in three of the last four years. The estimated Chinook return for the three-system index this year is nearly 85,000 Chinook below the 250k threshold and is the lowest in-river Chinook estimate since the Council implemented the lower bycatch limits based on the threshold of ‘low’ Chinook salmon abundance. The Council also requests that the report include recommendations to evaluate impacts of chum salmon bycatch with currently available data.