

See also #81-89-FB

STATEMENT ON KING CRAB RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

is the policy of the Board of Fish and Game and the Department to manage Alaska's king crab fishery in a manner that establishes stability and eliminates, as much as possible, extreme fluctuations in annual harvests that have at times characterized this fishery.

The achievement of such management depends on the maintenance of crab stocks that are comprised of a broad base of various age-classes of legal size crab rather than creating an industrial dependency upon a recruits-only harvestable resource. By maintaining a fishery on several year classes the ups and downs associated with strong and weak year classes would tend to dampen.

The method of management is based on the assessment of stock composition parameters resulting in regulatory "guideline harvest levels" and represents the desire of the department to depart from a system of fixed quotas in king crab management to a system of flexible quota ranges. A flexible guideline harvest system must be founded on biological considerations from an adequate data base.

It is the policy of the department to manage the resource conservatively while information for instituting the management method is being gathered, developed and refined. Stocks should be monitored annually to provide information reflecting indices of abundance of prerecruits, recruits and postrecruits for proper determination of current and subsequent guideline harvest levels. When a strong year class enters the fishery, the harvest level should be increased -- but not so high as to prevent an appropriate portion of the strong year class from carrying over to be harvested in subsequent years.

The benefits of a flexible system of guideline harvest levels should be most apparent when weak classes enter the fishery. If previous stronger year classes have been partially protected by the guideline harvest levels, there will be enough older crabs to substantially reduce the decline in the catch and broodstock abundance that would result from incoming weak year classes.

When adequate information on the status of king crab stocks has been available, the department has permitted the fishery to harvest additional older crab nearing the end of their life span, when such crab were considered as surplus to the breeding requirements of the stocks.

Expansion of king crab policy:

Sustained levels of king crab production also require the protection of stocks from harvest during surrounding critical periods of their life cycle. Closure of the fishing season is necessary during annual migrations into shallow water at which time king crab become soft through molting, school and subsequently mate. It is further recognized that during the following periods of peak molting king crab are unacceptable for commercial utilization until they have sufficiently reestablished an acceptable meat to body weight ratio, the shells have hardened adequately and can be handled with minimal mortality or damage. It is the policy of the department to establish fishing seasons based on the best biological information within each area.