

Amendment 53 to the Fishery Management Plan for
Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs

Additions are in bold. Words indicated with a strikethrough (e.g. ~~strikethrough~~) should be deleted from the FMP.

(1) Add the following section at the end of Chapter 6.2, Rebuilding Overfished Fisheries:

6.2.3 Eastern Bering Sea snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*)

On October 19, 2021, NMFS determined and notified the Council that the Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) snow crab stock was overfished because the estimated mature male biomass is below the minimum stock size threshold specified in the crab fishery management plan (FMP). To comply section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Council developed a rebuilding plan to be implemented prior to the start of the 2023/2024 fishing season. The rebuilding plan is consistent with the MSA and with National Standard 1 (NS1) Guidelines on time for rebuilding. Specifically, rebuilding within a time (T_{target}) that is as short as possible, taking into account the status and biology of any overfished stocks, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organizations in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the overfished stock with the marine ecosystems.

The projected target time for rebuilding, taking into account the biology of the species and current environmental conditions, is 6 years. Through the FMP, the State of Alaska is delegated management of the EBS snow crab fishery. The State sets a preseason Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and Guideline Harvest Level (GHL), and announces season or area closures when the TAC or GHL is reached. The State of Alaska's EBS snow crab harvest strategy applies during rebuilding and is provided in the Alaska Administrative Code at 5 AAC 35.517. The State harvest strategy is more conservative than the FMP's control rule parameters for EBS snow crab because, under the harvest strategy, a higher level of biomass is required to open directed fishing than under the F_{OFL} control rule. Throughout the rebuilding plan for EBS snow crab, several sources of information would be maintained to facilitate the determination of adequate progress.

The NMFS eastern Bering Sea bottom-trawl survey provides data for annual assessment of the status of crab stocks in the BSAI, including EBS snow crab, and would continue throughout rebuilding. The BSAI Crab Plan Team would report stock status and progress towards the rebuilt level in the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for Eastern Bering Sea snow crab. Additionally, ADF&G and NMFS will continue to monitor directed fishery catch and bycatch of snow crabs in other fisheries. ADF&G requires full observer coverage (100%) for catcher processors and partial coverage (30%) for catcher vessels participating in the fishery. Observers monitor harvest at sea and landings by catcher vessels and shoreside processors. ADF&G reports the total harvest from the commercial fishery and that report will be included annually in the SAFE. The contribution of the rebuilding plan's assessment and monitoring to stock recovery would be additive to measures already in place that limit the effects of fishing activity on EBS snow crab.

The main driver in the speed of rebuilding is likely related to recruitment and the ecosystem conditions that allow for increased recruitment into the population. Uncertainty surrounding recruitment and mortality under current ecosystem conditions is expected to heavily influence the rate at which the stock is able to rebuild under the proposed projection parameters. Fishing mortality under the State's current harvest strategy is expected to have only insignificant or minimal impacts on the rate of rebuilding.

(2) Revise the following in Chapter 6.2, Rebuilding Overfished Fisheries:

- 1. Remove section 6.2.1, Bering Sea Tanner (*Chionoecetes bairdi*) crab, which was declared overfished March 3, 1999;**
- 2. Remove section 6.2.2, Bering Sea snow (*Chionoecetes opilio*) crab, which was declared overfished on September 24, 1999;**
- 3. Remove section 6.2.3, St. Matthew blue king (*Paralithodes platypus*) crab, which was declared overfished on September 24, 1999; and**
- 4. Renumber sections as follows:**
 - a. 6.2.1, Pribilof Islands blue king crab (*Paralithodes platypus*)**
 - b. 6.2.2, St. Matthew blue king (*Paralithodes platypus*) crab**
 - c. 6.2.3, Eastern Bering Sea snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*)**