

Amendment 50 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.

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

6.2.5 St. Matthew blue king (*Paralithodes platypus*) crab

The SMBKC stock was declared overfished on October 22, 2018, because the estimated spawning biomass was below the minimum stock size threshold specified in the crab FMP. In order to comply with the MSA, a rebuilding plan was developed by the Council to be implemented prior to the start of the 2020/2021 fishing season, as required by the MSA in section 304(e). The rebuilding plan is consistent with the MSA and with 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 of fish, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organizations in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the overfished stock of fish with the marine ecosystems.

A projected time for rebuilding, taking into account the biology of the species and current environmental conditions, is 25.5 years. Through this FMP, the State of Alaska is delegated management of the SMBKC fishery the State sets preseason TACs and GHs, and season or area closures when the TAC or GH is reached. The State of Alaska's SMBKC harvest strategy is provided in the Alaska Administrative Code at 5 AAC 34.917 and that strategy applies during rebuilding. The State harvest strategy is more conservative than the FMP's control rule parameters for SMBKC because, under the harvest strategy, directed fishing is prohibited at or below a larger biomass level than under the F_{OFL} control rule. Throughout the rebuilding plan for SMBKC, 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 SMBKC, 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 the king and Tanner crab fisheries of the BSAI. Additionally, ADF&G and NMFS monitor directed fishery catch and bycatch of blue king crabs in other fisheries. ADF&G requires full observer coverage (100%) for both catcher vessels and catcher processors participating in the fishery. Observers monitor harvest at sea and landings by catcher vessels 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 to stock recovery would be additive to measures already in place that limit the effects of fishing activity on SMBKC. Measures are in place to protect habitat and reduce bycatch potential through prohibitions on nonpelagic trawl gear in the St. Matthew Island Habitat Conservation Area. Additionally, several other prohibitions and restrictions on commercial fishing gear are in place around and nearby St. Matthew Island.

The SMBKC stock has been in a low productivity phase since 1996 and population recovery will be greatly influenced by future environmental conditions. Despite existing protections and frequent fishery closures, the stock has remained in this low productivity phase. Projections of stock recovery incorporate ecosystem constraints on productivity by forecasting recruitment based on an empirically derived stock-recruit parameters.