

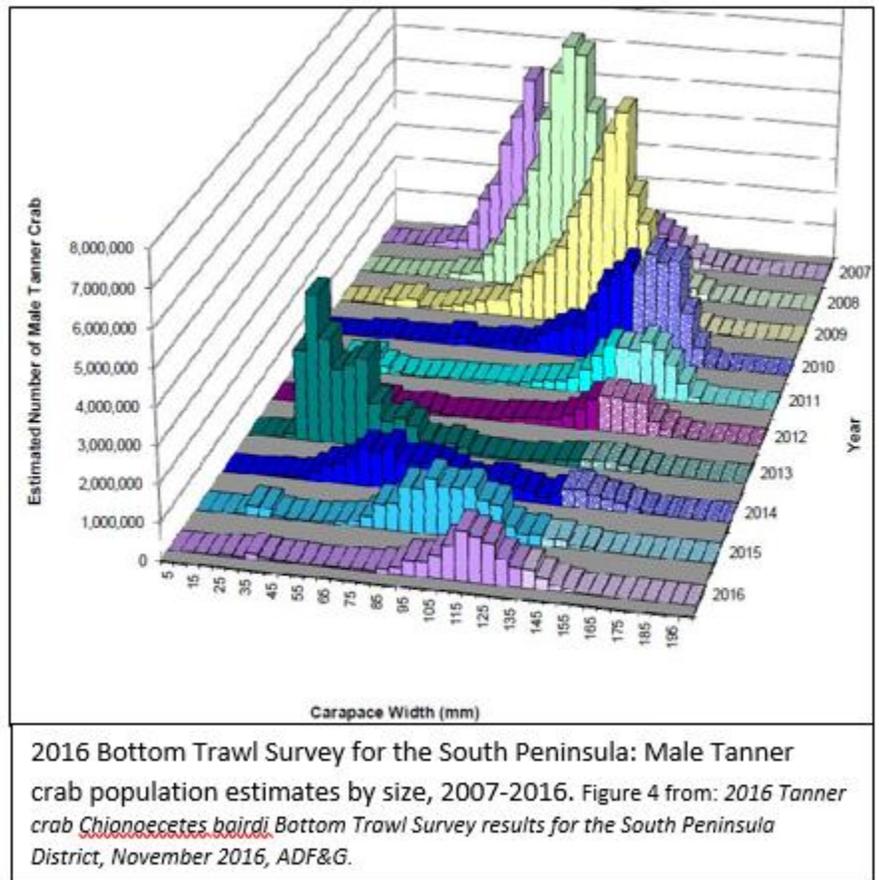


## Board of Fish Takes Action on Crab Fisheries

The Alaska Board of Fisheries Statewide King & Tanner crab and Supplemental issues meeting, March 20 – 24, 2017 in Anchorage, generated changes in fishery regulations. The Board adopted 22 of the 36 proposals on their agenda. More than 60% of the proposals were ratified.

There was intense local interest on the discussion of Proposal 249, submitted by Sand Point residents Ben Mobeck, William Dushkin and Paul K. Gundersen. This proposal sought to set a 20 pot per vessel limit in the South Peninsula Tanner crab fishery, with a 1,000 pot limit for the fleet. The proposers reasoned that a lower pot limit could help the tanner stock in the region get re-established. There has not been a tanner fishery in the South Peninsula area since 2013, and the near future recruitment outlook is bleak.

“I have fished in this area all my life,” Ben Mobeck stated during public comment to the Board. “The 20 pot limit at



this time will help the crab stock increase.... and will slow the pace of fishing, which leads to a better, cleaner product and helps the Department with management,” said Mobeck.

Some area fishermen were opposed to the proposal. “What this proposal will do is cause hardships on owners and crew for over 80% of the fleet...The cost of operating needs to be considered,” said Melvin Larsen, testifying to the Board, “It’s got to be profitable to work.”

The Board of Fish adopted Proposal 249, using substitute language found in RC 20 submitted by Mobeck, by a vote of 4 - 3 at 5:07 p.m. Thursday evening, but the proposal was brought back for reconsideration first thing on Friday morning. The proposed language was amended to remove the 1,000 pot overall limit and remove the deadline to register for the fishery. The final vote was 6 - 1 to adopt the amended proposal.

Currently, the South Peninsula fishery allows active fishing and pulling gear from 8 a.m. to 5:59 p.m., with soak time at night. The pot limit per vessel has been 30 pots per vessel if the guideline harvest level (GHL) is 2 million pounds or less, and no more than 50 pots when the GHL is over 2 million pounds.

With the adoption of Proposal 249 as amended, the pot limit for future tanner crab fisheries will be:

- Up to a 2 million pound GHL, no more than 20 pots per vessel.
- 2 million to 3 million pound GHL, no more than 30 pots per vessel.
- GHL of 3 million pounds or more, up to 50 pots per vessel.

The Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers were successful in getting some of their proposals adopted. Bering Sea crabbers can now retain up to 35% incidentally caught opilio crab while fishing tanner crab west of 166° west longitude, up from a 5% retention rate. In addition, Bering Sea crabbers can now rig, bait and set gear for a new crab fishery before delivery of crab from a previous crab fishery, providing even more opportunities for fleet efficiency.

The Board also adopted a Board generated proposal based on language provided by the BSAI crab industry, to re-examine the Bairdi (tanner) crab harvest strategy at a meeting to be scheduled in June. There was no BSAI tanner quota allocated this year based on the current harvest strategy, which crabbers and communities complain is not working properly.

In other regional actions, the Board reduced the no fishing zone for pot gear for Pacific cod around the Steller sea lion haulout at Sutwik Island in the Chignik District, from 20 miles to only 3 miles during the parallel season. However, this action only applies to vessels not holding a Federal Fisheries Permit. Also, the Board reduced the amount of sockeye that can be taken for subsistence at Front Beach, Unalaska, at the request of the Unalaska Fish & Game Advisory Committee.

The Board recognized five Advisory Committee members from around the State for the 2017 Advisory Committee Excellence in Service Award during Miscellaneous Business, including David Osterback from the Sand Point Advisory Committee. Mr. Osterback has been a member of the Sand Point Advisory Committee since the inception of the committee. Congratulations David O!

*By Ernie Weiss, Aleutians East Borough Natural Resources Director*

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