

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2005/06 BERING SEA SNOW CRAB SEASON AND TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have completed analysis of NMFS trawl survey data for the Bering Sea snow crab stock. Abundance and biomass estimates were made using survey data.

The total mature biomass (TMB) of male and female snow crabs in the Bering Sea is estimated to be above the harvest strategy minimum threshold for a fishery opening. The 2005/06 snow crab total allowable catch (TAC) is summarized as follows:

IFQ	33,465,600 pounds
CDQ	3,718,400 pounds
Total	37,184,000 pounds

Total mature snow crab biomass increased 78% from the 2004 survey, to 610.7 million pounds, and is above the minimum stock size threshold of 460.8 million pounds. The estimated abundance of males greater than four inches carapace width (CW) is 72.1 million crabs, which is higher than the 2004 abundance estimate of 67.6 million crabs. Old and very-old shell males constitute 46% of males greater than four inches CW.

The 2005/06 snow crab TAC was calculated using an exploitation rate of 16.88% applied to the mature male biomass. This calculation resulted in a TAC greater than the harvest strategy cap of 58% of the exploited legal male abundance, therefore 2005/06 TAC was set using a 58% harvest rate on the exploited legal male abundance. Exploited legal males are defined as all new-shell male snow crabs greater than or equal to four inches carapace width (CW) and 25% of old-shell male snow crabs greater than or equal to four inches CW.

The 2005/06 Bering Sea snow crab fishery will open at 12:00 NOON October 15 and will remain open through May 15, 2006 in the Eastern Subdistrict and through May 31, 2006 in the Western Subdistrict. The snow crab fishery is open in all waters of the Bering Sea District west of 166° W long., except for ADF&G statistical area 695700 which lies between 169° W long. and 170°

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W long. and 57° N lat. and 57° 30' N lat. ADF&G statistical area 695700 will be closed to commercial fishing for snow crabs to protect the Pribilof blue king crab stock. All juvenile and the majority of mature blue king crabs captured during the 2005 survey were found in this statistical area. This closure does not impact snow crab TAC calculations for 2005/06.

The pot limit for this fishery is 450 pots per vessel. Buoy tags are currently available for sale at the Dutch Harbor and Kodiak ADF&G offices.

New regulations require proof of a current valid United States Coast Guard (USCG) Commercial Fisheries Safety Decal before a vessel registration is issued. Participating vessels must also have an activated vessel monitoring system approved by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

The operator of a vessel participating in IFQ, or CDQ crab fisheries must notify the USCG at least 24-hours prior to departing port when carrying crab pot gear. USCG can be contacted at: Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, (907) 581-6738, and Kodiak, (907) 654-5588.

Preseason gear inspections will be available in Dutch Harbor beginning on October 10, 2005 and in Akutan, King Cove and False Pass beginning on October 11, 2005. Vessel registration will begin at 12:00 NOON on October 13, 2005. An individual holding a current Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) Bering Sea Tanner crab interim use permit card (T91Q or T09Q) must be aboard the vessel when it is registered. Vessels may fish concurrently for IFQ and CDQ crab, but a separate registration and CFEC permit card is required for each fishery. At the time of registration, all pots onboard the vessel or in wet storage must be in compliance with current Bering Sea commercial snow crab fishing regulations.

Vessels participating in IFQ and CDQ fisheries may form gear operation cooperatives. Each vessel must register those vessels authorized to operate the vessel's gear at the time of registration. When a vessel transports crab pot gear to the fishing grounds for another vessel, the vessel owning the crab pot gear must be active within seven days in the registration area where the crab pot gear is deployed.

West of 166° W longitude, vessel operators may harvest Tanner crab and snow crab concurrently. Each vessel operator is restricted to a single species allocation of crab pot gear (450 pots) and must designate at the time of registration the quantity of pot gear registered and the quantity of pot gear configured for each species.

Vessel operators shall notify the department within 72-hours of completing fishing operations in a registration area or when departing the registration area with gear in long-term storage. The Board of Fisheries established a 14-day period when unbaited gear may be stored outside of designated storage areas after fishing is completed. Pots must be removed from the water or placed in long-term storage if left unattended in a registration area for more than a 14-day period. Additionally, a vessel's registration will be invalidated after 14-days of inactivity in a registration area.

For questions regarding issuance of quota share and IFQ/IPQ, contact NOAA Fisheries RAM Division at 1-800-304-4846 (option #2). For questions regarding federal Crab Rationalization Program regulations, contact NOAA Fisheries Sustainable Fisheries Division at (907) 586-7228 or the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement in Kodiak at (907) 486-3298 or Dutch Harbor at (907) 581-2061. For further information on state management contact the Alaska Department of Fish & Game in Dutch Harbor at (907) 581-1239 or in Kodiak, at (907) 486-1840.