



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

October 19, 2021

Mr. Simon Kinneen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Chairman Kinneen:

This letter provides notification that the Bering Sea snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*) status has been changed to overfished. The Bering Sea snow crab assessment shows that mature male biomass (MMB) is 50,600 metric tonnes (mt), which is less than the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) of 76,700 mt, therefore the stock is overfished. However, it is not subject to overfishing. Total catch for Bering Sea snow crab in the crab fishing year, from July 2020 to June 2021, was 26,200 mt, which is below the overfishing level of 95,400 mt.

MMB of Bering Sea snow crab was at historical highs in the 1990s. However, in 1999, NMFS determined that Bering Sea snow crab was overfished, and NMFS implemented a rebuilding plan in 2000. The stock was declared rebuilt in early 2012. MMB was at an all-time low in 2016 but steadily increased since that time due to a large recruitment pulse moving through the size classes. However, the recruitment pulse has since disappeared from the survey.

The Bering Sea snow crab fishery has never been closed to directed fishing since the inception of the fishery in 1977. Retained catches have slowly increased since 1999 and retained catch in the 2020/21 fishery was the highest it has been in the last six years. Discard mortality occurs both in crab and groundfish fisheries.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and NMFS prevent overfishing from occurring. NMFS proposes to monitor the Bering Sea snow crab bycatch inseason during the groundfish fisheries and to work closely with the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game to monitor catch in the snow crab and other directed crab fisheries to ensure there is no overfishing. In addition, the MSA requires that a rebuilding plan be developed and put in place within two years of the stock being declared overfished. The rebuilding plan should specify a time period for rebuilding the fishery, not to exceed ten years.

We look forward to working with the Council to develop a rebuilding plan and to ensure that overfishing does not occur for Bering Sea snow crab.

Sincerely,

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region



