

Alaska Dispatch News

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The Bering Sea crab fleet now stands at 77 vessels, a far cry from the nearly 250 boats in a frenzied race to pull pots before the fishery downsized to catch shares in 2005. Fewer boats means fewer hands on deck, and as with other fisheries, the Bering Sea crabbers are “graying” and need to recruit young entrants to sustain the iconic fisheries. The shareholders have devised a way to give captains and crews a first crack at available crab.

“The long-term future of the fishery is dependent on bringing young people in. That’s not unique to crab; we are seeing it all over Alaska and fisheries in the U.S.,” said Mark Gleason, executive director of Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, a harvester group. “There just isn’t that pipeline of young people coming up through the ranks, and a ‘right of first offer’ program is one of the ways we hope to change that.”

It has long been a goal of fishery managers to make sure that active participants have access to crab quota shares. Gleason said in numerous workshops, ABSC got feedback from captains and crew members on road blocks to buying in and that helped shape the ROFO program.

“Basically, it carves out at a minimum 10 percent of a (catch share) transaction, and that is then offered on a right of first offer basis to active participants. So there is prior notification when quota becomes available, it takes large blocks and chops it up into smaller chunks, and it increases transparency.”

Gleason called it a more affordable way to get ownership in the crab fisheries, without the need to buy or build a big boat.

“With quota-based management, and the opportunity to buy smaller chunks of quota, a guy can get in with relatively little amount of money. He can buy quota, bring that to the boat he’s fishing on, and use it to build his assets over time. That’s a new pathway into ownership in this fishery that never existed before,” he said.

All crab transactions are handled by permit brokers, such as Dock Street in Seattle, regarded as the “go to” place for crab shares. Specialist Jeff Osborn admits availability is sketchy, and shares of red king crab are very rare. Dock Street currently has one listing for 120,000 pounds of snow crab at \$20 per, and four listings of bairdi Tanners at \$18-\$20 per share.

Bering Sea crabbers can register to be notified when quota becomes available at www.crabqs.com [1].

Seafood bash gets bigger

Alaska's biggest seafood bash is expanding to include more new products and a third venue. Added to the traditional mix of retail, food service and smoked entries at the 22nd annual [Alaska Symphony of Seafood](#) [2], judges and fish fans will taste and rate items in a new byproducts category called "Beyond the Plate."

"The definition of this category is a consumer-ready product that is made with parts of seafood which would typically be deemed fish waste or a byproduct of the primary processing," said Julie Decker, executive director of the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, which hosts the Symphony. "The seafood industry has heavily invested in the development of new products from traditionally unused seafood parts. We are excited to offer this new category to highlight and promote the improvements the industry has made to reduce fish waste, develop new products and increase the value of Alaska's seafood."

All of the new products will be judged in February by a panel of experts in Seattle. That's followed by a seafood soiree in Anchorage where all the winners are announced, and then it's off to a new venue -- Juneau -- for a third seafood celebration. The event is topped off for the winners with a trip and booth space at the International Boston Seafood Show in mid-March.

"The multiple locations give seafood promoters the opportunity to introduce new value-added products from Alaska and gain exposure with industry and culinary experts, seafood distributors, and national media," Decker said. "The overall goal is to inspire innovative ways to use Alaska's natural seafood resources."

The Symphony of Seafood dates and the call for products will be out by the end of October. Entry forms are due by Dec. 31.

Diving for dollars

Every October swarms of divers head down to the depths for sea cucumbers, giant geoduck clams and sea urchins. Most of the action occurs in Southeast Alaska, where 70 divers are searching the bottom for booty. For cukes the harvest guideline is just over 1 million pounds, an increase of 8.5 percent from last year, and for geoducks, the 750,000-pound harvest is a 12 percent decrease. Southeast's red urchin availability often tops 5 million pounds, but there is little interest in that fishery, which pays out at about 30-cents a pound.

Kodiak is the only other region where dive fisheries for sea cucumbers and urchins occur, although on a much smaller scale. This year the harvest for 20 divers is set at 140,000 pounds for cukes, which could fetch \$5 a pound. No divers have signed on for more than 15 years for the Kodiak's green sea urchin fishery, which typically paid out at over \$1 a pound.

Fish watch

Alaska's largest herring fishery at Togiak in Bristol Bay will be even bigger next year. State managers are expecting a harvest of 29,012 tons next spring, an increase of nearly 4,000 tons over the 2014 fishery. The grounds price was a dismal \$50/ton -- that could increase if processors

add canning lines to their operations instead of using only the herring roe.

Salmon fishermen at upper Cook Inlet caught fewer fish but scored higher prices. The catch of 3.2 million sockeye salmon was 20 percent below the 10-year average, but the value of the fishery at \$35 million was the ninth best since 1960. Sockeye salmon represents over 90 percent of the value of the upper inlet fishery.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.crabqs.com>

[2] <http://www.afdf.org/symphony-of-seafood>

[3] <mailto:msfish@alaska.com>

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