



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XD167]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Cost Recovery Program

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notification of fee percentage.

SUMMARY: NMFS publishes notification of a 3 percent fee for cost recovery under the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program. This action is intended to provide holders of crab allocations with the 2023/2024 crab fishing year fee percentage so they can calculate the required cost recovery fee payment, which must be submitted to NMFS by July 31, 2024.

DATES: The Crab Rationalization Program Registered Crab Receiver permit holder is responsible for submitting the fee liability payment to NMFS by July 31, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Amy Hadfield, (907) 586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

NMFS Alaska Region administers the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program (Program) in the North Pacific. Fishing under the Program began on August 15, 2005. Regulations implementing the Program can be found at 50 CFR part 680.

The Program is a limited access privilege program authorized by section 313(j) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The Program includes a cost recovery provision to collect fees to recover the actual

costs directly related to the management, data collection, and enforcement of the Program. The Program is consistent with the cost recovery provisions included under section 304(d)(2)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. NMFS developed the cost recovery regulations to conform to statutory requirements and to reimburse the agency for the actual costs directly related to the management, data collection, and enforcement of the Program. The cost recovery provision allows collection of 133 percent of the actual management, data collection, and enforcement costs not to exceed 3 percent of the ex-vessel value of crab harvested under the Program. The Program provides that a proportional share of fees charged will be forwarded to the State of Alaska for reimbursement of its share of management and data collection costs for the Program.

A crab allocation holder generally incurs a cost recovery fee liability for every pound of crab landed. Catcher vessel and processor quota shareholders split the cost recovery fees equally with each paying half, while catcher/processor quota shareholders pay the full fee percentage for crab processed at sea. The crab allocations subject to cost recovery include Individual Fishing Quota, Crew Individual Fishing Quota, Individual Processing Quota, Community Development Quota, and the Adak community allocation. The Registered Crab Receiver (RCR) permit holder must collect the fee liability from the crab allocation holder who is landing crab. Additionally, the RCR permit holder must collect their own fee liability for all crab delivered to the RCR. The RCR permit holder is responsible for submitting this payment to NMFS on or before July 31, in the year following the crab fishing year in which landings of crab were made.

The dollar amount of the fee due is determined by multiplying the fee percentage (not to exceed 3 percent) by the ex-vessel value of crab debited from the allocation. Program details may be found in the implementing regulations at 50 CFR 680.44.

Fee Percentage

Each year, NMFS calculates and publishes in the **Federal Register** the fee percentage according to the factors and methodology described at § 680.44(c)(2). The formula for determining the fee percentage is the “direct program costs” divided by “value of the fishery,” where “direct program costs” are the direct program costs for the Program for the previous fiscal year, and “value of the fishery” is the ex-vessel value of the catch subject to the crab cost recovery fee liability for the current year. Fee collections for any given year may be less than or greater than the actual costs and fishery value for that year, as regulations establish the fee percentage in the first quarter of the crab fishing year based on the fishery value and costs in the prior year.

According to the fee percentage formula described above, the estimated percentage of costs to value for the 2022/2023 fishery was 5.93 percent. As this is higher than the maximum fee percentage, the fee percentage will be 3 percent for the 2023/2024 crab fishing year. This is an increase by approximately 0.77 percentage points from the 2022/2023 crab fishing year fee percentage of 2.23 percent (87 FR 41292, July 12, 2022). Direct program costs for managing the fishery increased by approximately 10 percent from 2022/2023 to 2023/2024, while fishery value decreased by approximately 58 percent, resulting in the increased fee percentage. Similar to previous years, the largest direct Program costs were incurred by the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, respectively.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1862; Pub. L. 109–241; Pub. L. 109–479.

Dated: July 28, 2023.

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National Marine Fisheries Service.

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