PRESS RELEASE

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Council advances pelagic trawl discussion paper; UCB reaffirms commitment to research and collaboration

SEATTLE — June 8, 2026 — United Catcher Boats (UCB) reaffirmed its commitment to ongoing scientific research, collaboration and responsible fisheries management following action by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to continue its review of pelagic trawl gear performance, ongoing research efforts, and potential future management approaches through the development of a discussion paper.

UCB supports the continued advancement of scientific research and remains committed to collaboration with fishermen, scientists, managers and the public to improve understanding of pelagic trawl gear performance, habitat interactions, crab distribution and broader ecosystem dynamics in the Bering Sea.

Those collaborative efforts have included substantial investments in research focused on pelagic trawl gear operations, habitat interactions, Bristol Bay red king crab distribution and broader ecosystem dynamics in the Bering Sea. Those efforts continue today through the Gear Innovation Initiative (GII), Fishing Effects (FE) Model refinements, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) reviews, crab distribution and habitat research, exempted fishing permit (EFP) projects and other collaborative scientific efforts.

"Fishermen have an important role to play in advancing our understanding of the marine ecosystem and the fisheries that depend on it," said United Catcher Boats Executive Director Andrea Keikkala. "Our members remain committed to supporting research, sharing operational knowledge and working alongside scientists and managers to better understand these issues and help inform future decisions."

The GII, a collaborative research effort involving Alaska Pacific University's Fisheries, Aquatic Science and Technology Laboratory, fishermen, vessel operators and industry partners, is collecting information on fleet-wide gear configurations, fishing practices, gear performance and operational variability under real-world fishing conditions.

UCB noted that this work is helping improve scientific understanding of how pelagic trawl gear operates across a range of environmental conditions and fishing scenarios while providing information that can support future scientific analyses and management discussions.

The council also reaffirmed the importance of continued refinement of the Fishing Effects Model and endorsed completion of the ongoing Gear Innovation Initiative, exempted fishing permit projects, and crab habitat and distribution research efforts currently underway. The council noted

that the Fishing Effects Model remains the peer-reviewed, best available tool for assessing fishing effects on benthic habitat in Alaska.

During its June meeting, the council reviewed updates on ongoing research efforts, including the GII work by the pollock sector, crab habitat and distribution studies by the crab sector, an exempted fishing permit project led by Trident, and the pollock fleet's voluntary dynamic spatial avoidance measures implemented during the 2026 A season. The council subsequently directed development of a discussion paper examining potential mechanisms to reduce pelagic trawl bottom contact, implementation considerations, available technologies and operational approaches, and potential conservation and fishery tradeoffs associated with those measures.

In addition to participating in ongoing research, the pollock fleet responded directly to council direction during the 2026 A season by implementing voluntary dynamic spatial avoidance measures in the Red King Crab Savings Area (RKCSA) designed to reduce overlap with areas of concern while maintaining operational flexibility to address other conservation priorities, including salmon bycatch avoidance while maintaining catch efficiency.

The measures incorporated available survey information, crab research, fleet monitoring tools and operational experience. Vessel activity was monitored through existing accountability systems, including vessel monitoring systems, catch accounting programs and fleet reporting tools.

The council expressed appreciation for the pollock industry's implementation of voluntary dynamic spatial avoidance measures in 2026 and requested the fleet continue those measures during the 2027 A season using the best available information while maintaining salmon avoidance as the highest priority.

"One of the strengths of Alaska federal fisheries management is the willingness of fishermen, scientists, managers and stakeholders to work together to answer difficult questions," Keikkala said. "The dynamic avoidance measures implemented this year demonstrated that collaborative approaches can be developed and applied while new information continues to emerge."

UCB emphasized that many of the scientific questions currently under discussion are being actively evaluated through ongoing research efforts and established scientific review processes.

"We care deeply about the health of the Bering Sea ecosystem and the future of its fisheries," Keikkala said. "Those are goals we share. Many of the businesses and families participating in the pollock fishery also have longstanding investments in Alaska's crab fisheries. While we believe ongoing research should continue to inform future management discussions and decisions, we understand the council's interest in evaluating additional approaches and we welcome thoughtful examination of our fishing practices. The pollock fleet has invested significant time, resources and expertise into helping answer these questions because we share the goal of ensuring healthy ecosystems and sustainable fisheries. We remain committed to transparency, collaboration and following the science wherever it leads."

UCB said it will continue working with fishery managers, researchers, Alaska Pacific University, the Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation, fishing communities and other stakeholders to advance scientific understanding and support sustainable fisheries management in the North Pacific.

About United Catcher Boats

United Catcher Boats (UCB) represents catcher vessels in federally managed trawl fisheries off Alaska and the West Coast. As a nonprofit trade association, UCB advocates for sustainable management, responsible fishing practices and policies that support U.S. jobs and global seafood markets.