

February 15, 2021

Representative Dan Ortiz
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Support for HB 41

Dear Representative Ortiz:

The Steering Committee of the Alaska King Crab Research, Rehabilitation and Biology (AKCRRAB) program would like to express appreciation and support for House Bill 41. Our group needs this legislation to continue our program and its potential benefits to the crab stocks and to Alaska fisheries and communities.

The AKCRRAB program is a coalition of university, federal and stakeholder groups, formed in 2006 with the goals of adding to the scientific understanding of crab life history and ecology, as well as the eventual rehabilitation of depressed king crab stocks in Alaska. AKCRRAB has developed scientifically sound strategies for hatching, rearing and outplanting king crab in Alaska, in order to help restore populations to self-sustainable levels. This technology can be transferred to other crab species.

In phase one, from 2006 to 2011, AKCRRAB researchers made significant accomplishments in developing and improving methods of hatchery rearing of larval and juvenile king crab from wild-caught broodstock, to the point where large-scale production is feasible. Parallel field and laboratory studies of crab ecology and population genetics were also conducted during this time.

In the second phase, hatchery studies have been complemented by studies essential to understanding optimal release strategies, appropriate habitat, and potential impact on existing ecosystems. This research is providing the science necessary for informing the responsible release of hatchery-reared animals. Increased knowledge will allow scientists and managers to assess the feasibility of ecologically sound rehabilitation of depressed stocks, with potentially substantial benefits to Alaska.

In the third and final phase, AKCRRAB intends to evolve from the current, research-oriented coalition, to a formal entity focused on transitioning hatchery techniques and outplanting technologies to communities and industry as part of statewide efforts to help rehabilitate depleted king crab stocks. As phase three develops, the program will require support and guidance from the State of Alaska, as the transition from feasibility to implementation will need to be guided with a new regulatory structure.

House Bill 41 is a response to the need for new regulations for shellfish culture. Without this legislation and the implementing regulations, no further progress can be made by AKCRRAB and industry. We are literally in a holding pattern until this badly-needed legislation is successful. We have supported similar legislation now for six years, and have seen very little to no opposition.

During that time, several crab stocks have declined further, some crab fisheries have been closed, and the Bristol Bay Red King Crab population is nearing the level that will trigger extensive regulatory responses that have the potential to further restrict not only the crab fishery itself, but also groundfish fisheries. We very much hope that this Legislature will get HB 41 over the finish line.

The AKCRRAB Steering Committee is pleased that the Legislature is addressing this need. We intend to participate fully in further discussions and hearings on this important legislation. The AKCRRAB Steering Committee stands ready to testify and interact with Committee members and staff as needed. Please let us know how we can be of help.

Best regards,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The first signature is 'Ginny L. Eckert' and the second is 'Heather D. McCarty'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Ginny L. Eckert, College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, UAF, Juneau
Heather McCarty, Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association
AKCRRAB Steering Committee Co-chairs