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June 28, 1990
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NEW STUDY TARGETS COD FISHING WITH CRAB POTS
MODIFICATIONS COULD BOOST CATCHES, CUT BYCATCH

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA -- While many of Alaska's longliners and trawlers sit out the fishery closures in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, a few fishermen are helping develop a new fishery using crab pots to catch Pacific cod. Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) has launched a project to boost their efforts, with the help of a \$112,900 grant from Alaska Science & Technology Foundation.

AFDF, a seafood industry research and development firm, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game will test different crab pot modifications that, when applied to the cod fishery, could help increase cod catches and decrease bycatch harvests of crab and halibut. Bycatch refers to species caught incidentally while fishermen are targeting on other species. Crab and halibut are harvested incidentally in both bottom trawl and longline fisheries for cod, pollock and other groundfish, and in recent years bycatch limits have caused closures of groundfish fisheries off Alaska. If pot fishermen can economically harvest cod with a minimum of bycatch, they could increase their fishing opportunities, and possibly the value of their catch.

AFDF will work with Alaska Department of Fish & Game in Kodiak to conduct a demonstration cod pot fishery using gear with several different modifications. The study team will test pots with tunnel openings of different shapes and configurations, and with different excluder gear including commercially available gear from "Got Yas," and Neptune Trap and Trigger.

AFDF hopes to advise crab fishermen on how to switch to cod with a minimum of risk, and to help groundfishermen who use pots to increase their cod catches. Data from the study also will help management agencies develop cod pot fishery guidelines based on more solid information than is available now.

"It appears that crab pots are an efficient and clean method of harvesting cod," said AFDF executive director Mel Monsen. "That is, the bycatch of halibut and crab is relatively low. The possibility for crab fishermen of entering into the lucrative cod fishery would be very attractive. It's also possible that some trawlers and longliners might switch to pot gear to harvest cod, but the additional pot gear could cause some disruption of existing fishing grounds which would have to be resolved."

According to Fish & Game figures, 43 of the 289 boats that fished cod in the Western Gulf of Alaska this year used pot gear. Pot fishermen harvested 5.1 million lbs. of cod this year, nearly 8% of the 66 million lbs. harvested in the area. This year the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will consider a standard definition of pot gear. Preliminary ADF&G observer data shows that non-standardized pot fishing for cod produces only about 0.4% halibut bycatch.

Results from the project should be available from AFDF by the end of 1990.