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NEW REGS ALLOW GTRs FOR CRAB POTS

TIMED RELEASE DEVICES DECREASE MORTALITY FROM LOST POTS

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA -- The Alaska Board of Fisheries recently approved the use of the Galvanic Timed Release (GTR) device on king and Tanner crab pots to decrease ghost fishing without risking the target catch. The GTR provides an escape mechanism on crab and groundfish pots that helps prevent ghost fishing if the pot is lost. It was tested in a cooperative project between Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Seward Marine Center.

ADF&G has required cotton twine escape mechanisms on all pot gear since 1978. The twine ultimately deteriorates in saltwater and will release the door of the pot so crab and fish can escape if the pot is left to soak too long. GTRs may now be used as an alternative to the cotton twine.

"Theoretically, 120-thread twine degrades in a six-month period," said Al Kimker, ADF&G shellfish biologist in Homer. "But in that time the pot could cause hundreds of mortalities of the animals captured in the pots before the twine deteriorates. A Tanner crab will begin to starve to death after 30 days in a pot."

The GTR, he said, will deteriorate in a predictable amount of time, depending on the size used. "Fishermen can see how quickly the GTR is degrading so they can replace it before it breaks and they lose any catch," he said.

Fishermen have rankled at the twine release regulations because twine can break unpredictably, leaving a fisherman hauling up a string of empty pots. For that reason, many don't obey the regulation. And even when they do, cotton twine doesn't always break when it

should. Kimker noted that GTRs are easier to see and test than cotton twine, making enforcement of the regulations easier.

In 1988, Tanner crab pots left in Cook Inlet after the season closed killed an estimated 15,000 Tanner crabs in the 60 days after the season ended. When the gear was finally pulled, none of the 120-thread biodegradable twine had degraded.

"We're hoping this one small device will give pot fishermen a way to comply with the regulations without risking their catch," said Chris Mitchell, executive director of Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation. "In the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery alone, about 15,000 pots are lost every year. Using GTRs will keep those pots from unnecessarily killing valuable crab."

Mitchell noted that currently only one company is making GTRs. Florida-based International Fishing Devices, manufactures the GTRs which are marketed in the Northwest and Alaska by Neptune Marine Products of Seattle. Ed Wyman, Neptune's president indicated that the 30-day devices retail for about \$1.50. "They are a reasonably priced alternative to cotton twine, particularly when you consider losses incurred due to the unreliability of cotton twine," Wyman said.

The GTR study, which provided reliable statistics and crab starvation data, was conducted by the Foundation, ADF&G and Seward Marine Center in a cooperative effort funded by a grant from the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation.