

Russia hints it may auction all crab quotas

By Ivan Stupachenko

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The Russian government is considering selling the remainder of the country's crab quotas via auctions, a follow-up to its controversial decision last year to auction half of its crab-fishing rights.

Russian Federal Agency for Fisheries Head Ilya Shestakov expressed openness when asked in an interview with the business paper Kommersant whether it's possible that the

remaining 50 percent of crab quotas – currently distributed based on averages of a company's previous catch – could be sold through auctions in the future.

"It's an interesting and live idea. There is a discussion going on on the ups and downs of it," he said.

Moving the entirety of Russia's crab quotas to an auction system would continue a dramatic shift in the country's fisheries management system undertaken in recent years.

The original initiative to sell crab quotas through auctions was met with outrage from many fishing companies, arguing that previous attempts at auctioning quota in the early 2000s had proved ineffective. The Russian government eventually decided to move only half of its crab quota distrubtion to an auction system, while retaining the so-called "historic principle" for the remainder.

The auctions, which took place in late 2019, thoroughly restructured the market, and has led to a significant shift in Russia's maritime economy, as the winner of each lot must also order a crab-fishing vessel to be built at a Russian shipyard. In late December 2020, the first ship under this program was floated out.

There has been little reaction from the industry so far to Shestakov's claim, though some negative remarks have surfaced in local media. North West Fishery Consortium Executive Director Sergey Nesvetov said in an interview with Fishnews that potential changes to the quota distribution system – proposed for both fish and crab quotas – are the primary business risk facing Russian fishing companies. Firms are now investing in new vessels based on economic calculations that assume quotas will continue to be allocated on the historic principle through 2034, leaving them in a complicated situation if quota allocations shift, Nesvetov said.

In 2021, Russia fisheries will issue combined quotas for nearly 100,000 metric tons (MT) of crab: 75,600 MT in the Far Eastern Fishery basin and 24,000 MT in the Northern Fishery basin.

In the Far East, the quotas separate into 16,100 MT of king crab, 8,700 MT of blue manna crab, 867 MT of brown king crab, 3,100 MT of golden king crab, 485 MT of horsehair crab, 31,100 MT of snow crab, 835 MT of bairdi crab, 7,300 MT of triangle tanner crab, and 7,100 MT of red snow crab.

In the North, it's 10,800 MT of king crab and 13,200 MT of snow crab.

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