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Annual Notice to Industry

March 7, 2012

Dear Washington Shrimp Trawl License Holder:

The purpose of this letter is to provide information regarding important new regulations and key issues for the Washington shrimp trawl fishery in 2012. Enclosed is a summary of Washington landings updated to include 2011 catch data and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) annual pink shrimp newsletter.

Please review this letter and the enclosed materials carefully: There are new regulations for the shrimp trawl fishery in 2012. In addition, pending federal actions relative to the threatened status of eulachon have implications for the fishery beyond 2012. The ODFW newsletter is a "must read" as it contains a wealth of information, some of which is echoed below.

New Rules for Washington in 2012

New regulations were adopted by WDFW in January 2012. The new regulations eliminate soft-panel excluders and reduce the spacing between bars on rigid grate style excluders from a maximum of 2 inches to 0.75 ($\frac{3}{4}$) inches. The primary objective of narrower bar spacing is to reduce the retention of eulachon smelt, which were listed as a federally threatened species in 2010.

- Beginning April 1, 2012, the maximum allowed bar spacing in fin fish excluders is 0.75 ($\frac{3}{4}$) inches. This same requirement will be in effect in Oregon for the 2012 pink shrimp season.

When planning for the 2012 season, shrimpers should consider that both Oregon and Washington are implementing the rule for $\frac{3}{4}$ " excluders and there may be delays obtaining them from manufacturers by April 1.

Special gear permits can be issued on a case-by-case basis to allow non-legal excluders to be used temporarily. The availability of the special gear permit should not be used to delay ordering excluders that meet the new bar spacing requirements. The primary purpose of these permits is to allow fishers the opportunity to test or evaluate excluder designs or installation configurations during the season.

- Also starting April 1, 2012, you will need to notify WDFW enforcement before removing trawl gear from the vessel prior to offloading shrimp. This requires leaving a message at the following phone number: (360) 902-2936, press zero when the recording begins.

WDFW Observer Project

In 2010, eulachon smelt (also known as Columbia River smelt) were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In the listing, the pink shrimp fishery was deemed a moderate threat to recovery. Marine life-stage information is inadequate for eulachon and bycatch data in the shrimp trawl fishery is limited. To collect more information, the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) initiated increased coverage of the shrimp trawl fleet, aiming for 20% in 2011 and 2012, compared to earlier years when coverage rates were about 7- 8%. In addition, WDFW received funding to place observers on Washington-licensed shrimp trawl vessels from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in October 2010. In 2011, approximately 25% of the shrimp fishing trips originating from Washington coastal ports were observed by WDFW observers.

Beginning April 2012, WDFW will again place observers on Washington-licensed shrimp trawl vessels. Vessels will be assigned an observer on a trip-by-trip basis. Due to reduced project funding there will only be two WDFW observers for the 2012 season (down from four in 2011). The WCGOP will also continue to place federal observers on pink shrimp trawl vessels in 2012. Federal observers are assigned for a full month to a particular vessel. A vessel selected to carry a federal observer will not be selected during that same month for state observer coverage.

Note, only those vessels holding a Washington shrimp trawl license and operating from Westport or Ilwaco will be asked to carry a state observer. The WA shrimp trawl permit conditions and vessel manual were written more broadly, but for practical purposes the scope of the project is limited to these two ports. Oregon vessels that hold a Washington shrimp trawl license that do not operate in Washington are not expected to participate in the observer project. **However, if at any time in the season, an OR-WA licensed vessel lands in a Washington port, the vessel operator must contact the Observer Project Lead before departing the port on the next shrimp fishing trip.** The specific requirement is listed on the Pink Shrimp Trawl Observer Project Vessel Manual enclosed. Following the protocols outlined in the manual is a condition of the Washington Shrimp Trawl Permit. **Brad Speidel is the Washington observer project lead and may be contacted anytime at (360) 581-6131.**

Fishery Coverage and Biological Sampling

Last year some skippers felt the amount of coverage on their vessel was excessive. Please recognize that if only a few vessels are operating at any given time, the likelihood of carrying an observer increases. The high level of coverage will not continue indefinitely – the WDFW project ends in 2012. WDFW will continue to deploy observers by trip and not

by month to ensure as high a coverage rate of the fleet as possible and to observe as many different vessels in the fleet as possible.

A key aspect of the observer project is the opportunity it presents to collect biological information; it isn't just about quantifying bycatch. For example, WDFW observers collected fin clips from eulachon for genetic testing last year. Genetic analysis may provide a useful tool in identifying patterns of catch contribution and migration in the ocean by stocks of eulachon originating from the Columbia River, the Fraser River in Canada or other coastal river systems. As a second example, WDFW collected length from eulachon in 2011, and the WCGOP intends to do likewise this year. Length data are used to evaluate size- and age-class composition of fish populations. From these data, an at-sea index of relative abundance for eulachon might be developed in the future. Currently no such measure of abundance exists to inform recovery efforts.

Underwater Video Camera System

Last year the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSFMC) expanded an existing program to make underwater video camera systems available to shrimp trawlers. These systems were developed by the National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) Habitat and Conservation Engineering group specifically to aid fishers in evaluating industry-designed methods to reduce bycatch. A couple of Washington shrimpers borrowed this system last year and were able to produce some stunning video footage of their gear while fishing. If you are interested in borrowing a system, or would like more information, please contact Mark Lomeli, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, by telephone: (541) 867-0544 or by email: mlomeli@psmfc.org.

To increase the number of camera systems available to assist shrimpers, WDFW is in the process of purchasing a similar system. The goal is to enhance and support the ability of shrimpers to evaluate gear performance by providing video that shows fish and shrimp behavior relative to excluder installation, escape-hole placement, ground-gear configurations, etc. Moreover, pairing video footage with observer coverage on a tow-by-tow basis will allow visual interpretations of gear effects on bycatch to be verified with sampling data. Since this gear will be WDFW-owned its use will be exclusive to Washington shrimpers. Stay tuned, more details will be forthcoming.

Washington Shrimp Trawl Logbook

Washington-licensed shrimp trawl fishers will again be required to maintain a logbook for all shrimp fishing activity in 2012 regardless of area fished. This includes trips that are not observed by WDFW or WCGOP. Either a Washington or Oregon logbook is acceptable. **However, skippers using an Oregon logbook need to make sure that they submit a copy to WDFW.** The WDFW logbook will not have duplicate pages; photocopies of submitted logs will be provided to fishers upon request.

Washington Observer Project – Vessel Manual

Fishery permit conditions also specify license owners/operators will comply with observer project protocols. These protocols are described in the enclosed handout *WDFW Pink Shrimp Observer Project – Vessel Manual*. The purpose of these protocols is to ensure

that project objectives can be achieved. Please review the manual; it is also important that vessel skippers and crew are familiar with it as well. Pay particular attention to safety requirements – vessels must have passed a US Coast Inspection in the last two years.

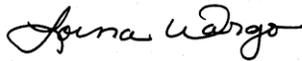
Informational Meetings

More information regarding the 2012 season and potential federal actions relative to eulachon will be presented at a Washington Crab Producers sponsored meeting scheduled for **11 a.m., Friday, March 23, 2012 at The Islander at Westport, WA.**

A public meeting is also scheduled for **10 a.m. March 27, 2012 at the Port of Ilwaco Office, Ilwaco, WA.** The same information and materials will be distributed at each meeting. If you are unable to attend either meeting, and need more information, please contact Lorna Wargo at (360) 249-1221 or (360) 489-4679.

If you have any questions, I may be contacted at: (360) 249-1221; Lorna.Wargo@dfw.wa.gov

Sincerely,



Lorna L Wargo
Natural Resource Scientist - Marine Fisheries

cc: Craig Burley, WDFW Fish Management Division Manager

enclosures:

Washington Ocean Pink Shrimp Catch Data
Example Special Gear Permit
Observer Project Vessel Manual
NOAA Green Sturgeon/Eulachon Bycatch Report w/Cover Letter
ODFW Annual Pink Shrimp Review