



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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September 3, 2024

Ms. Janet Coit
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring MD 20910

Re: West Coast Take Reduction Team

Dear Assistant Administrator Coit,

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) appreciates and thanks NOAA Fisheries for taking the time to meet with staff in July to discuss the West Coast Take Reduction Team (TRT) that is being formed to address three strategic marine mammal stocks (Central America/Southern Mexico humpback whales, Mainland Mexico humpback whales, and Eastern North Pacific blue whales) and five commercial fisheries (Federal sablefish pot, California [CA] Dungeness crab pot, Oregon [OR] Dungeness crab pot, Washington [WA] coastal Dungeness crab pot, and CA spot prawn pot). WDFW provides the following recommendations for your consideration.

The immediate goal of the take reduction plan is to reduce mortality and serious injury (M/SI) in commercial fisheries below Potential Biological Removal (PBR) and management actions in the West Coast Dungeness crab fisheries will be instrumental in meeting that objective (16 U.S.C. 1387(f)(2)). Each strategic stock currently included in the scope of the TRT has a different PBR and M/SI associated with U.S. commercial fisheries. Only one of the strategic stocks, the Central America/Southern Mexico-CA/OR/WA humpback whale stock, has a mean annual M/SI in U.S. fisheries greater than the stocks PBR in U.S. waters (Carretta et al. 2023). The mean annual M/SI in U.S. commercial fisheries is 8.1, more than double the stocks PBR, and while the majority of the M/SI is attributed to unidentified fisheries (M/SI 4.582), commercial Dungeness crab fisheries on the West Coast contribute the majority (68%) of identifiable fishery M/SI impacts (M/SI 2.4) (Carretta et al. 2023). Additionally, West Coast Dungeness crab fisheries collectively contribute to the majority of identifiable fishery M/SI in the other two strategic stocks. Therefore, **WDFW would like to stress the importance of having adequate representation from the West Coast Dungeness crab fisheries in the TRT.**

Industry participation from the West Coast Dungeness crab fisheries should include representation that adequately represents the diversity of the fishing fleets, including but not limited to, a range of vessel sizes, different pot tier fishing permits, seasonal fishery participation strategies, geographic differences within states, and multi-state and multi-fishery permitted vessels. WDFW recognizes with the consensus based and resource intensive nature of the TRT

the importance of keeping the team size manageable, however the target representation shared by NMFS during the July meeting is inadequate. Four to six representatives for the entire West Coast Dungeness crab fishery are insufficient to represent the diversity of the fleet. **WDFW strongly recommends that the TRT includes at least nine commercial crab industry representatives.**

At WDFW's initial meeting with NMFS in July, NMFS shared that they are tentatively planning on convening the TRT in June or July, earlier than the settlement agreement deadline. The WA coastal Dungeness crab fishery is managed with a fishing season open from December 1 to September 15, but the season opening is often delayed for other management considerations (e.g., crab condition, biotoxin levels). While the fishery season has the potential to be open for 9.5 months, the fishery can be described as a derby fishery with the majority of revenue from the fishery generated during the first three months it is open. Due to the derby nature of the fishery, participation in the start of the season is vital for the license holders. Within the last ten years of the fishery, an average of over 73% of the revenue from the fishery season is generated from December – March. It would be detrimental to any active fisher to miss weeks of fishing opportunity during this window of time to participate in the TRT process. Furthermore, WDFW expresses concern with convening the TRT in July with the six-month deadline for developing a take reduction plan as this would likely lead to the TRT finalizing a plan during December. The fishery has opened in December in four of the last ten years, and for those years when the fishery opens in December participating in the fishery during this month is crucial because over 32% of the seasons of ex-vessel value is earned during December. **WDFW supports convening the TRT in June 2025 and avoiding meetings from December through March.** We would also like to recognize that for many fishers Dungeness crab only represents a fraction of their portfolios, and the above does not consider other fishing income and the timing of those opportunities.

WDFW recognizes that the intensive consensus-based process of the TRT requires well informed and consistent participation is essential for the successful development of a take reduction plan. However, we also recognize that the time commitment will be substantial and the need to offer flexible opportunities for engagement. **WDFW strongly recommends that NMFS increases accessibility by providing remote participation, allowing for alternates for TRT members, and holding meetings in or near coastal communities.** In consideration of an unpredictable future, allowing for alternates for TRT members is essential for building a resilient TRT with full membership throughout the process.

WDFW discussed the TRT industry member selection criteria shared by NMFS and engaged with the Coastal Dungeness Crab Advisory Board to compile a list of recommended individuals for consideration. WDFW agrees with NMFS that individuals need to be knowledgeable, collaborative, available to participate, and have a track record of effectively representing the industry. While we see the value in having active fishers on the team, a non-active (i.e., “retired”) fisher with a working knowledge of the fishery has more flexibility to attend these meetings and should be considered equally. **WDFW recommends Larry Thevik, Kelsey Cutting, and Greg McMillian for consideration in serving on the TRT as WA coastal Dungeness crab fishery**

industry representatives (Table 1). All have extensive experience in the WA coastal Dungeness crab fishery, other west coast fisheries, and have served in advisory roles.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the TRT and provide industry recommendations for NMFS' consideration and look forward to continuing to collaborate in the future. The WDFW director will identify the best fit individual to represent WDFW on the TRT at a future date. At this time, Megan Hintz is the WDFW staff who is available to support the agency and NMFS in preparation for the TRT. If you have any further questions, please contact me or Megan Hintz.

Sincerely,

Heather Hall

Heather Hall
Coastal Region Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

CC: Kimberly Damon-Randall, NOAA Office of Protected Resources
Dan Lawson, NOAA West Coast Regional Office
Kristy Long, NOAA Office of Protected Resources
Kelly Susewind, WDFW Director

Table 1. List of Washington coastal commercial Dungeness crab fishery participants interested in being considered as industry representatives for the West Coast Take Reduction Team.

Name	Email	Phone #	Fishing Port	WA coastal Dungeness crab fishery involvement (years)	Other fisheries
Larry Thevik	thevik_rouse@yahoo.com	360-289-2647	Westport	54	OR Dungeness crab, AK Dungeness crab, Sablefish LE, WA Spot shrimp, Pacific halibut, Hagfish, Groundfish longline, WA/OR Salmon troll, WA salmon gillnet, West Coast Albacore troll
Kelsey Cutting	kelseycuttingo@gmail.com	360-244-0507	Ilwaco	24	OR Dungeness crab, West Coast long line permit (Black Cod)
Greg McMillian	capteric3@aol.com	503-717-3327	Ilwaco	10	OR Dungeness crab, Columbia River Gillnet, Bristol Bay Salmon
Jerry Lowe	jdlowe@centurytel.net	360-648-2453	Westport	51	Puget Sound Dungeness crab, Salmon troll, Tuna troll, WA salmon gillnet

References:

Carretta, J.W., E.M. Oleson, K.A. Forney, M.M. Muto, D.W. Weller, A.R. Lang, J. Baker, B. Hanson, A.J. Orr, J. Barlow, J.E. Moore, and R.L. Brownell. 2023. U.S. Pacific Marine Mammal Stock Assessments: 2022. U.S. Department of Commerce. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS–SWFSC–684. 409 p