

Summary

Meeting dates: November 4-5, 2016

Agenda item: Illegal, Unreported, or Unregulated fisheries (IUU) for King Crab – Briefing and Public Hearing

Presenter(s): Mike Cenci, Deputy Chief, Enforcement

Background summary:

WDFW regulatory authority is closely aligned with classification of species in the Washington Administrative Code. The current list of classified shellfish species by rule does not include three species of king crab that make up a significant proportion of the Alaskan crab harvest, and are known to be involved in the illicit seafood trade. One of these species, red king crab, is designated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a “species at risk”, and information from Washington crab fishermen suggests it also occasionally exists in Washington offshore waters.

Currently, illegal, unreported, or unregulated fisheries (IUU) are a global concern and negatively impact conservation and the legitimate market. The Russian king crab fishery is considered one of the most unsustainable fisheries on the globe, and directly competes with the Alaska fishery with respect to three king crab species shared by fleets in both countries.

To remain viable, Washington commercial fishing vessels, fish processing operations, and seafood trade interests rely on a number of West Coast and Alaska fisheries, including the Alaska king crab fishery. Failing to control the importation of illegally harvested crab from Russia directly and negatively affects conservation, the seafood market place, and the interests of the Washington commercial fishing industry. According to members of the Bering Sea Crab Association (BSCA), the IUU crab issue has resulted in an estimated \$600 million loss in crab related revenue and tax since 2000.

Investigation and past case work shows that Washington state ports are receiving IUU Russian king crab. Of the \$255 million of the US' frozen crab imports from Russia in 2015, 81% are imported through Washington State ports (Blaine, Seattle, Tacoma, and, to a lesser extent, Bellingham). Over the last 5 years, as much as 92% (2014) of all frozen (king and snow) crab from Russia entered through either the ports of Blaine, Seattle, or Tacoma.

By adding three species of king crab to the current shellfish classification, brokers who currently conduct business in Washington state will be required to be licensed as wholesale fish dealers and maintain and produce records for inspection by Fish and Wildlife Police. Shippers and storage facilities will not be required to be licensed, but will be required to produce records associated with the origin of crab. These records are already maintained, however access to that information cannot be compelled for inspection purposes unless a classified species is identified. A number of the seafood brokers, shippers and cold storage facilities dealing in king crab are already licensed due to their involvement in trading or storing classified species.

Department staff will brief the Commission on rules needed to enable Enforcement officers to better regulate illegal importation of king crab into Washington.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Does the Commission wish to leverage its enforcement presence to address that our state is a safe haven for illegal imports that compete with legitimate local interests.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

WDFW Police collaborated with the WDFW representative on the North Pacific Council to connect with members of commercial industry. The North Pacific Crabbers Association and Alaska Processors have both written letters supporting our efforts to combat illegal trade in crab.

Action requested:

Briefing only

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission action:

N/A

Communications Plan:

Officers will educate businesses identified as operating without licenses and maintain a license enforcement tolerance for a reasonable time. A web page is being designed that will provide information, and other material will be developed and distributed through public contacts.