



State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

48 Devonshire Road, Montesano, Washington 98563-9618 (360) 249-4628 FAX (360) 249-1229

June 24, 2015

Dear Coastal Dungeness Crab Industry Member:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about changes to the Summer Fisher Management Plan (Plan) that will be in place this year. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a meeting for all interested industry members on April 24, 2015 to initiate discussions regarding summer fishery management measures. Two additional meetings with the Coastal Dungeness Crab Advisory Board and other interested industry members followed to continue the discussions. These discussions were triggered in part by the particularly chaotic end to the 2014 crab fishery. The situation last summer provided a chance to engage with stakeholders, re-evaluate our summer management measures, and discuss ways we might improve our summer management approach in the future.

The Plan was developed with input from the commercial Dungeness crab industry and has been in place since 2002. The primary objectives of the Plan, which are consistent with the Fish and Wildlife Commission's policy on Dungeness crab management, are: to protect the reproductive capacity of the resource, maximize the economic benefit from the resource, ensure a high quality product, and to recognize the economic well-being and stability of industry. The purpose of the Plan is to guide WDFW staff and provide predictability to the coastal crab industry on the implementation of specific management measures to protect soft-shelled crab. The objectives and purpose of the Plan continued to provide the overarching principles that guided our recent discussions.

The Plan has been revised and updated several times since its implementation. Changes have improved summer fishery management and our ability to protect the coastal crab resource, while continuing to provide some crab fishing opportunity during the summer. While status quo was an option, it was clear that changes were needed to avoid the situation that occurred at the end of the season last year. A wide range of alternatives were discussed this spring, ranging from a 1,200 pound weekly landing limit beginning July 1 (similar to what is in place in Oregon) to a season closure based on a meat recovery rate (i.e. when a significant number of soft shelled crab are present prior to September 15).

The final recommendation that was selected will revise the current summer management protocols to implement a weekly landing limit of 2,500 pounds on July 1 each year. To avoid confusion, the weekly landing limit will begin on July 5, 2015 to align with the Sunday through Saturday accounting periods. Furthermore, WDFW will continue to collect shell condition data through the remainder of the season and take additional measures, following the status quo testing protocols, if large numbers of soft shelled crab are present.

Summary of revised testing protocols and management measures:

- July 1 (note: the weekly landing limit will begin the week of July 5, 2015): 2,500 pound weekly landing limit;
- July 1-September 15:
 - WDFW will continue to collect bi-weekly shell condition data during ride along trips with consenting commercial fishermen, and dockside shell condition data at crab buying facilities.
 - If shell condition testing shows that less than 50 percent of the crabs sampled during a single ride along trip are hard-shelled **OR** if three dockside samples show that less than 75 percent of the sample is hard shelled during a two week period, the weekly landing limit will be reduced to 1,200 pounds;
 - If any three shell condition tests conducted during random dockside sampling during any two week period following the implementation of the 1,200 pound landing limit indicates that less than 75 percent of the crab in the sample are hard shelled, WDFW may consider reducing the weekly landing limit;
 - If continued sampling shows that more than 50 percent of the crab on a single ride along trip are hard shelled **AND** if any three dockside samples within a two week period following the implementation of the 1,200 pound landing limit are more than 75 percent hard shelled, WDFW will increase the landing limit to 2,500 pounds.
 - The weekly landing limit will not increase above 2,500 pounds for the remainder of the season.

The first weekly period will be Sunday July 5 through Saturday July 11, 2015, accounting periods run Sunday through Saturday. Please see Attachment 1 for more details.

These changes are intended to provide additional protection to the Dungeness crab resource from handling mortality, maintain the flexibility of the current approach that addresses the variability in the presence of soft shelled crab from year to year through inseason monitoring, and avoid an early closure of the coastal Dungeness crab fishery.

In addition, to ensure that at sea shell condition data which forms the basis for our decision making is representative of crab condition, WDFW staff will be exploring ways to collect at sea shell condition data that doesn't rely solely on ride-along trips with consenting commercial fishermen. It can be challenging to schedule ride-along trips to collect at sea data and the situation becomes increasingly difficult when crab condition is known to be poor. As we explore fishery independent methods for collecting shell condition data, and likely even if an alternative approach becomes available, we will continue to rely on the cooperation of commercial fishers that are willing to take WDFW staff along during their fishing trips.

Several other potential management tools were discussed this spring that merit further exploration or discussion. WDFW appreciates the cooperative nature of the recent discussions given the different points of view held by participating individuals; I look forward to meeting with members of the coastal crab industry to explore these concepts in the future.

Coastal Dungeness Crab Fisher

June 24, 2015

Page 3

Domoic Acid Update: The coastal Dungeness crab fishery is currently closed from the Washington – Oregon border to Point Chehalis due to high levels of domoic acid. Recent testing indicates that domoic acid levels north of Point Chehalis remain below the action level. WDFW will continue to provide Washington Department of Health with crab samples from all coastal areas and will notify the crab industry if additional restrictions are required.

If you have questions regarding the information contained in this letter or other regulations pertaining to the coastal Dungeness crab fishery, please contact me at 360-249-1202 or Dan Ayres at (360) 249-4628 ext. 209.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Reed". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heather Reed
Coastal Marine Resources Policy Coordinator
WDFW

cc: James Unsworth, Ph.D.
Michele Culver
Dan Ayres
Dan Chadwick

Enclosure

2,500 Weekly Landing Limit

It is unlawful for any person licensed to fish under a Dungeness crab – coastal fishery license to possess or land crab in excess of 2,500 pounds during any weekly catch accounting period (Sunday through Saturday). See below for the list of catch accounting periods for 2015. Any crab taken prior to Sunday July 5, 2015 and not landed before 11:59 p.m. July 4, 2015 become part of the July 5 through July 11, 2015 accounting period catch.

2015 Catch Accounting Periods

July 5 – July 11, 2015

July 12 – July 18, 2015

July 19 – July 25, 2015

July 26 – August 1, 2015

August 2 – August 8, 2015

August 9 – August 15, 2015

August 16 – August 22, 2015

August 23 – August 29, 2015

August 30 – September 5, 2015

September 6 – September 12, 2015

September 13 – September 15, 2014