

Comm. Reports

Extension of 1972-73 Crab Season

Problem

The 1972-73 crab season will close on August 15, 1973 unless changed. Bell Buoy Crab Company of Seaside and 15 members of the Tillamook crab industry have stated in writing that they favor extending the season to September 15 or to September 1. A significant segment of the crab industry opposes an extension.

Background

The problem of crab season extensions was discussed at the February 1973 Fish Commission meeting. Material presented then is still valid and informative (attachment).

The 1972-73 season will be the poorest on record for Oregon with estimated landings of 3.0 million pounds or 500,000 pounds less than in the previous low year, 1963-64. Washington and California landings this year appear to be equally poor. Preliminary data indicates that the 1973-74 season will only be slightly better than the current one.

The California season was lengthened 2 weeks by the 1973 legislature and now closes September 1. Washington's season closes September 15.

It appears that the majority of the industry is opposed to season extension. In fact, some fishermen at Astoria and Newport and 11 plant managers interviewed at Newport, Winchester Bay, Coos Bay, Port Orford, and Brookings feel the season should end earlier than the current August 15 date.

Sampling out of Newport on July 20, 1973 revealed a high per cent (60±) of crabs being sorted at ^{sea}as softshells. Overall discard ratio was 3.5 crabs returned to every one kept in gear fished 3-4 fathoms and 17:1 for 7-8 fathoms. Washington biologists estimate that 10-15% of returned softshell crab die from discard handling.

In past years, fewer than 10 boats were fishing for crab at the time season extensions were considered. This year there are 34 boats fishing from Astoria to Port Orford as of July 25. Boats that were fishing at Brookings ceased fishing on July 23, 1973 because of the high incidence of softshell crab in the catch. There is no reason to believe that the boats fishing now will not continue to fish for crab if the season is extended. It is estimated that extension of the season this year, based on number of boats fishing and current landing levels, will result in over 100,000 pounds of crab landed.

Discussion

Four factors suggest that a season extension is not in order. The first is the low landings we are experiencing. Caution says that we should not push too hard on a resource that is producing at a low level. Additional considerations are the loss taken from handling crab and the objection of industry to fishing crab during the summer months. Action to extend the season will probably result in criticism and poor public relations.

Factors supporting the extension include the fact that there is a good demand for crab in the summer months and that it should be available on the Oregon coast at the time of heavy tourist demand. If the resource is so impaired that it cannot stand a small additional catch, then we should look seriously at curtailing fishing during the winter part of the season. Biologically, the stock does not appear to be endangered.

Staff Position

Because the catch made during the extension would be relatively small and because we do not anticipate recommending a restricted season in the fall, we do not object to action that would make September 16 the 1973 closing date for sport and commercial crabbing.

Fish Commission of Oregon
Management & Research Division
July 25, 1973