CRABBER/PROCESSOR COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOP
Hatfield Marine Science Center
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INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that fishery management has become much more complex in recent years as managers attempt to balance the well being of fishery resources with the needs of fishermen, processors/dealers and the public. Biological, economic, legal and social issues are involved. In order to achieve orderliness and direction among the interested groups it is mandatory that open lines of communication be established and active. This workshop was a step in that direction.

The workshop was designed for a group of fishermen and processor/dealers representing most Oregon ports who were selected because of their interest in the process. The workshop was open to other interested people but not advertised, in order to have a reasonably sized working group.

About 35 people attended. We talked about industry goals and objectives, management tools, industry views/ideas and specific concerns.

MANAGEMENT GOALS

Several legislative statutes guide the Department of Fish and Wildlife in managing the states fish and wildlife resources in concert with Fish and wildlife Commission policies. Uppermost of these concerning crab is to conserve and protect the biological productivity of the resource and the habitat so that the resource will be perpetuated for future as well as present generations of Oregonians. There must also be a balance between the interests of those who catch, process and deal with crab and the interest of the ultimate consumer. There is also the need to balance the cost of managing the crab resource with the benefits derived from resource. At the same time it is important to maintain the traditional values of public access to the resource that have developed over many years. And since the crabs do not recognize state or federal boundaries there is a need to promote coastwide uniform management policies to keep the fishery orderly and as efficient as possible.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Eleven management objectives have been suggested for the crab fishery to make the goals functional. Although the objectives are listed separately they are implemented in combination.

1. Maximize meat yield (quality)

Meat yield is first estimated by fishermen at sea by looking at the crab, its weight and the softness or flexibility of the shell. Meat yield is determined by the processor by comparing the weight of cooked picked meat to the weight of whole live crab or in the case of whole cooks the weight of the whole live crab to the weight of drained cooked crab. Meat yield will vary greatly from area to area, by time of year and by year. To obtain maximum meat yield crab must be taken when they are full of meat. This can be achieved by a uniform rigid season that would open in January or February, a rigid season that would open by area or a flexible season that would open when the crabs were ready based on test fishing.

2. Maximize economic return to processors/community

The community here is mostly the coastal area where processing takes place. Maximum economic return varies by plant according to the amount of crab handled, product form, and markets. Some plants handle a variety of other fish species while others concentrate on crab. Some plants land most of their crab early in the season when volume of crab is highest and few other fishing opportunities are available. Other plants operate at a lower capacity over most of the season. Whatever the method of operation, the plants keep many local people employed.

3. Maximize profits to fishermen (efficiency)

Maximum profits to fishermen depend on the size of the vessel, the number of pots fished, method of operation and how many months of the season are fished. Profits are enhanced when fewer boats are in the fishery which reduces competition for available crabs and space to set pots. Profits are further enhanced by reducing fishing risks and the need for more restrictive regulations such as pot, trip or poundage limits. A long season favors small boats while a short season favors large boats.

4. Maximize biological productivity

Making sure that there is adequate spawning to produce a sustained fishery is relatively simple for Dungeness crabs. But to obtain maximum biological productivity is not so simple. So far as we know the 6-1/4 inch minimum size limit on male crab, no taking of females and escape ports in the pots allow for adequate spawning. Productivity could be increased if the season were not opened until after the egg bearing time of the females (December to March) which would reduce the loss of egg masses caused by fishing operations. Closing the season when the crab are unfilled with meat (soft) would also help by reducing crab loss due to handling. Also, avoiding dead loss and waste caused by some fishing practices would aid productivity.

5. Maximize safety

Fishing vessel safety is to everyone's interest. However, intense competition for space to fish and to get one's share of the catch has created an opening day syndrome that clouds good judgement for some. Safety would be enhanced if there were fewer boats and/or pots, a poundage limit per trip and a guaranteed quota for each fisherman. Avoiding winter fishing would save many small boats and crews.

6. Fleet mobility

The majority of crab boats fish within a few miles of their home port. However, there are a number of mostly larger boats that fish many miles from their home port. For those who fish close to home uniform season openings and area licensing would be to their advantage. Limits on the number of boats and/or pots and fishing while other fisheries open would also be to their advantage. For those that favor maximum mobility, area openings, no limits on boats or pots and an open season when other fisheries are slow would be to their advantage.

7. Maximize management stability

Management stability would be increased by uniform and rigid regulations among Oregon, Washington and California. Limited entry may also make management regimes more uniform.

8. Minimize cost of management

Regulations that are few in number, clear and permanent cost less to implement. Eliminating or reducing the number of additional tasks such as test fishing and season adjustments will also keep costs down.

9. Minimize fishery/gear conflicts

Fishery/gear conflicts can be lessened by opening the season coastwide which would spread the gear out over more area. However, in recent years there has been so much gear set for opening day that crowding is frequent and wide spread. Conflicts with other fisheries are lessened when the crab season is open when other fisheries are closed. Season/area agreements with other fisheries have also helped but long lasting success with such agreements has not been good.

10. Minimum price to consumer

Low prices for consumers occurs when a lot of crab is landed in a short time period. Crab is also cheaper if sold directly off a boat.

11. Maximize availability of fresh crab

A long season promotes the availability of fresh crab. An open season in bays for commercial crabbing while the ocean season is closed also helps.

MANAGEMENT TOOLS

It is plain to see that the crab fishery cannot be managed for a single objective. While maximum meat yield is important there are tradeoffs required that may contradict other objectives. The same is true for the management tools available to agencies. Criteria can be developed to handle soft crab problems. Or, the coast could be divided into areas and have corresponding seasons for each area according to the crab condition in each one. Limited entry could be a useful tool in the crab fishery, but would have adverse affects on some people. Pot/trip limits could also be used to slow the fishery but would be difficult and expensive to enforce. The more traditional tools of season, size and sex are most used and have served quite well over the long term.

The management objectives were then related to four interest groups: fishermen, processors, coastal communities and consumers. Comments were solicited from the audience according to their specific interest and are shown in Table 1.

INDUSTRY COMMENTS/BY PORT

Astoria prefers:
- Year around season - to enhance safety, crab quality, stability in catch, profits
- Area licensing
- Condition criteria for opening season if season is not all year
- Pot limits if effort needs to be limited
- Increase size limit
- Spread out catch over more of season
- Maximum flexibility in fishing

Garibaldi prefers:
- Basic concern is safety
- Increase preseason soak time
- Have year around season
- Want maximum profits for fishermen
- Year around season would help

Newport prefers:
- Quality important
- Dec. 1 opening promotes stable market
- Keep traditional season
- Improve safety by increasing preseason soak time

Increase size limit to increase value
Maximum flexibility
No area or effort limits

Coos Bay prefers:
Add two weeks to end of season
No effort limits (boats)
Fishery more stable through time; spread out catch, increase profits and safety.
Pot limit to lessen gear conflicts and opening day syndrome.
Spread out catch to coincide shrimp and crab seasons for maximum economic benefits to plant.
Flexibility needed.

Brookings prefers:
Effort limits needed on pots/boats from out of area
Area limits - license to specific area
Christmas market important
Condition criteria needed - test fish
Try to get maximum meat yield
Maximum profits

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

The group was asked to share specific concerns and the following is an abreviated summary of their answers.

Soft Crab
Leave season as is and let market control
If entire coast has a problem then delay/close season
Announce any delays before gear goes out
Do test fishing
Criteria for delaying season
Problem on whole coast
Less than 18% meat recovery (pot run)

If season closed after gear is out, leave gear out. Test fishing by volunteers or with Crab Commission funds.
Reopen whole coast when recovery is 18% or better using weighted average.
Close and/or open independent of Washington or California because flexibility is important to fishermen.
Tri state Jan. 1 opening not favored because Christmas market will be lost.
Uniform coastwide management desired.
If fishery problems arise, a pot limit is more desirable than trip limits, closures or limited entry. However, pot limits may not be enforceable - manpower/means, jurisdiction.

Preseason soak time
Leave at 64 hrs.
Need similar hours at borders - perhaps a separate area (Mack Arch South) for the south coast.
Return to 84 hrs on rest of coast if possible.
Safety most important

End of season
Allow one week to pull pots after season closes
Would September closing date be possible?

Washington moratorium study
Discussion on moratorium deferred until we see more from Washington.

Marine mining
Voluntary logbook preferred
Need adequate distribution

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Of about 35 fishermen and processors from most Oregon ports the fishermen expressed the need to be flexible, that safety was very important and they wanted to make money. They were also aware that a quality product was important, but were willing to tolerate lesser quality if the problem was localized and infrequent. If a problem was serious enough to delay the season the action should be taken before pots are set. Uniform, stable regulations were preferred, but some fishermen favored area licensing, pot/boat limits, an increase in preseason soak time, a longer season and a larger size limit. There was also some interest in developing criteria on how to handle soft crab problems including test fishing, and in a volunteer logbook to provide data to protect crabbing interests from marine mining. There was little comment on Washington's proposal for a study on limited entry in the crab fishery. Most people felt that the workshop was worthwhile and at least one should be held annually.

Table 1. Management objectives related to interest groups.

OBJECTIVE	FISHERMEN	PROCESSOR	COMMUNITY	CONSUMER
Max meat yield (quality)	XX	XX		X
Max economic return to community/processors	X	XX	X	
Max profits to fishermen (efficiency)	XX	X		
Max biological productivity				
Max safety	X			
Max flexibility	XX			
Min flexibility				
Max management stability	X			
Min cost of management	X		X	
Min fishery/gear conflict	X			
Min price to consumer				X
Max availablilty of fresh crab				X