

Staff Statement to Fish & Wildlife Commission on  
Crab/Scallop Gear Conflict

S-2

Problem

While scallop fishing success has declined, a number of fishermen anticipate fishing for scallops this winter. Scallop grounds north of the Umpqua River run through traditional crab fishing areas. When the crab season opens December 1 a gear conflict and an unacceptable loss of crabs in scallop gear could result.

Background

About 16 million pounds of scallops (shell weight) have been taken off Oregon in 1981. Although <sup>118</sup>124 boats made landings, about 90% of the catch was taken by 22 large out-of-state scallop vessels. Fewer <sup>only 1</sup>than 10 vessels <sup>is</sup> are now fishing. Fishing was first concentrated in the Coos Bay area, then shifted north to Siuslaw grounds, then to the Tillamook Head area. Recent effort has been off Tillamook Head, Siuslaw, and ~~near the Oregon-California border~~. Most fishing has occurred at depths between 40 and 50 fathoms.

Gear-Conflict

South of the Umpqua River most crab fishing is inside 30 fathoms. However, north of the Umpqua River fishing occurs out to 80 fathoms. Since crab pots with their individual lines and buoys are stationary, the use of mobile gear, i.e. scallop dredges, runs the risk of entanglement, resulting in pots being lost along with their catch of crab. Fishing time for scallopers is also lost as they remove lines and pots from their gear.

Monitoring of by-catch shows that capture and injury of crab in scallop dredges has not been a serious problem. Scallop boats have taken about 10 crabs per tow, about 10% of which were killed. Comments from scallopers, some of whom are also crabbers, are that the crab catch has been minimal. This may

change and become a problem with the change of season.

### Discussion

Gear conflict crab and scallop fishermen have met twice re gear conflicts, wanting flexibility in choosing fishing sites and to find a solution short of Fish and Wildlife Commission action. In contrast the Dungeness Crab Commission requested that ODFW ban scallop fishing from November 27 through March 31. At a second meeting fishermen began talking compromise. Another meeting is set for November 4. Input from more fishermen is wanted and an industry report to the Commission on the 13th is expected.

### By-Catch

Industry has not discussed the problem of taking excessive crab in scallop gear but will probably turn to the Commission for a solution if crab losses are severe. The issue will be one of economic trade-offs rather than a biological conservation matter if a problem develops. Fortunately when too many crabs are caught in dredges so much time is lost sorting crabs that scallopers are likely to move to another area or cease operations temporarily.

Data on crab catch in scallop gear is one of the objectives for the research now in progress with the NOAA vessel Chapman. Work in the Coos Bay area shows few crabs being caught. An update will be available at the hearing, November 13.

### Recommendations

Since industry is attempting to resolve the gear conflict problem and by-catch has not been severe it is appropriate to hear industry arguments before making recommendations. Staff will be involved in the next industry meeting which will influence our comment for the November 13 hearing. However, since a need for Commission action probably will not be evident until some-time after crab fishing begins, planned use of emergency rule on a standby basis may be the recommended course to follow.