

DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION

This proposal has not been approved or recommended by the Oregon Whale Entanglement Working Group. This proposal is draft, and is subject to revision, amendment, or not being adopted by the working group.

Close the Dungeness crab fishery earlier

- Consider a closing date between April 15 - June 15.
- Open to discussion and input from group about a specific closing date.
- Use best available data on whale distribution and timing to inform these discussions.
- Use information from the bioeconomic model and ODFW landing summaries to inform these discussions.

Rationale: This is a way to reduce risk of whale entanglement by limiting co-occurrence of whales with crab gear during times of year when humpback whales are most numerous and crab fishing is least profitable.

Risk: Erosion of the value of the fishery due to pressure from NGOs and poor public image of crab fishery limiting marketability of product.

Being categorized by NOAA as a level 1 fishery and having a take reduction team.

Lowered sustainability rating.

The take of an endangered species and being in violation of the endangered species act.

Benefits: Dungeness fishery will entangle fewer whales in Oregon.

Shows flexibility and intent for the fishery to coexist with whales in Oregon.

Strengthens sustainability of fishery, improves public image, and marketability of product.

Reduces conflict between other fisheries such as salmon and shrimp.

Fishery will have less lost gear due to shorter season.

Allows for a longer / earlier gear retrieval program.

Gives opportunity for retrieval work for vessels during late spring and summer.

Tradeoffs: Less access to the resource.

Leaves fisherman with few alternative fisheries with fewer options during spring and summer.

Reduced availability of live crab for local fish markets during Summer season.

Fish markets would need to sell previously frozen product and/or live crab from open fisheries to the north.

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Develop a derelict gear removal program that contracts vessels to remove gear in targeted areas.

- Develop a list of vetted vessels and skippers through the ODCC who could be eligible to compete for gear retrieval contracts.
- Assess the spatial distribution of current voluntary gear retrieval efforts to determine priority areas that are currently underserved.
- Determine a grid-based search area for each contracted vessel, and concentrate contracted vessels on areas that are currently underserved by voluntary crab pot removal program.
- Charge a fee for lost crab pots/tags, collected by ODFW when vessels apply for commercial crab permit for following year.

Rationale: The current voluntary derelict gear removal program does not incentivize removal of pots in poor condition, and removal effort is not uniformly distributed across the coast. A contract-based gear retrieval program that targets areas with current low gear removal effort would complement the current voluntary program.

Benefits:

Removes vertical lines and debris that are harmful to whales and other wildlife from the ocean.
Reduce conflict with other fisheries.
Cleaner ocean / environment.
Improve public image.
Return crab gear to original owner.

Tradeoffs: Crabbers required to “buy back” crab pots retrieved during program.
May be some administrative costs not covered by revenue from collected gear.