

With input from Marsha Schaefer, here is a summary of the August 7th Commission meeting about crab policy.

ATTENDANCE

In the morning session, all the meeting room chairs were filled, and a number of people were standing around the edges. Some chairs, plus a speaker, were set up outside in the hallway.

After lunch, most commercials were still there, but most sport crabbers did not attend. Almost all the seats in the meeting room were filled.

TESTIMONY

In the morning, 15 recreational crabbers spoke, and 14 commercials. In the afternoon, 3 commercials testified.

Recreational crabber testimony included the large imbalance between recreational/commercial license payments to WDFW for access to crab, the fact that almost all Washington crab (including coastal) are commercial/tribal caught, and that recreational crabbing deserves a higher priority. More citizen access and Option A were clearly favored.

The three topics most frequently mentioned by the commercials were:

1. "Giving more crab harvest to recreationalists will put me out of business, ruin my livelihood and my way of life."
2. We crabbers supply crab to citizens across Washington, to the 96% of them who do not go crabbing.
3. Recreational crabbers have proven to frequently not comply with sport crabbing rules.

(An afternoon commercial testifier also said that recreational crabbers ought to just quit and take up bowling instead.)

AFTER TESTIMONY WAS COMPLETED

Phil Anderson mentioned the April 2 letter from Ranker, Linville, and five other legislators concerning recreational compliance. He stated that additional legislators had raised the same issue with him. He said that he has supplied the Commission with additional information about the compliance issue.

Anderson stated that current compliance reporting cannot be compared with previous reporting because the methodology had been changed. In the past, if one person had been given 3 citations, that was counted as 3 "contacts." He said that now if one person was given 3 citations, that was counted as 1 "contact."

Anderson stated that compliance is increasing, along with compliance educational efforts.

Anderson presented results of July, 2010, LE activity. 529 vessels were contacted. There were 1159 people in those boats. 820 of those 1159 had crab. Of the 820:

- 21% had failed to immediately mark their CRC
- 8% had undersized crab
- 2.6% were over limit
- .5% had female crab

Anderson said that at-the-dock CRC compliance was better than on-the-water. He also admitted that the compliance rate is tied to the level of enforcement and when enforcement is increased, compliance rates increase. Paraphrasing, he said, "A law without enforcement is just advice."

Commissioner Orr raised the issue of the coastal crabbers supplying the Washington market, too, along with the Puget Sound tribes and the coastal tribes.

Commissioner Mahnken said that staff had been asked to develop information about the movement of commercial crab catches. (Exported out of state? Sold for in-state retail? Etc.)

AFTER THE MEETING

I spoke with a long-time citizen crab advisor Duane Nail from Discovery Bay. He discussed the wholesale free market for crab, saying that if at a moment in time, Washington crab are in excess of market needs here, they are shipped to Oregon, California, or anywhere else that will buy Dungeness. In return, when Washington markets are short, crab from other states are shipped here.

There's no such thing as a single, static "market" for Dungeness, he said. Supply, demand, and thus price drive marketing. The front-line crab buyers will sell to whomever gives them the best deal.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

The Commission plans to make their final decision about the new crab policy at their October meeting.

John Wicklund