



State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

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WASHINGTON COASTAL DUNGENESS CRAB INDUSTRY NOTICE

WDFW is implementing the following change to coastal commercial Dungeness crab regulations effective September 7, 2014:

It is unlawful for any person licensed to fish under a Dungeness crab-coastal fishery license to possess or land crab in excess of 2,500 pounds during any weekly catch accounting period (Sunday through Saturday). See the list of catch accounting periods below.

Any crab taken prior to September 7, 2014, and not landed before 11:59 p.m. September 6, 2014, become part of the September 7 through September 13, 2014 accounting period catch.

The area outside 4 miles remains open for fishing.

Weekly Catch Accounting Periods:

- September 7 through September 13, 2014
- September 14 through September 15, 2014

JUSTIFICATION:

The Summer Fishery Management Plan (Plan) calls for the implementation of management measures intended to protect the Dungeness crab resource when significant amounts of soft shelled crab are present during the commercial crab fishery. After the imposition of landing limits, the Plan directs WDFW to continue sampling. If three landings in a two-week period are found to have less than 75% crab that are hard (Grade A and B) then lower weekly landing limits to minimize encounters with soft-shelled Dungeness crab may be implemented.

On August 31, WDFW imposed a 4,500 pound trip limit to allow fishers to take advantage of fishing areas that had good quality crab while at the same time providing protection to soft shelled crab. However, it appears market pressure to land crab that is less than good quality has resulted in several landings of poor quality crab.

In the week since the 4,500 pound weekly landing limit was imposed, WDFW staff has continued to sample crab during dockside sampling. Several vessels were sampled with significant amounts of soft shelled crab. In addition to landings of soft crab, multiple vessels had weekly deliveries in excess of the 4,500 pound weekly landing limit. Five dockside samples were less than 60% hard shelled with four of those five 50% or less hard shelled. Crab condition data has met the criteria specified in the Summer Fishery Management Plan to trigger a lower weekly landing limit. We believe a 2,500 pound weekly trip limit is necessary to further minimize encounters with soft shelled crab and reduce handling mortality.

The success of WDFW's management of the summer fishery is dependent on the cooperation of the industry to work together to avoid the handling of soft-shell crab. With only a few days left in the 2013-14 season we are calling on everyone involved to take this matter seriously and avoid fishing on soft crab.