



The California Dungeness Crab Fishery

Straw problem statements and objectives for future management of the commercial fishery

Based on the findings from the Facilitation Team's June 2009 Situational Analysis, the outputs of the May 26-27, 2009 Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) meeting in Eureka, CA, and key issues identified in published literature and other sources, the DCTF Facilitation Team has prepared the following:

- Draft problems statements facing the fishery and,
- Straw objectives for review and revision.

These problem statements and very preliminary objectives are intended to guide DCTF workgroup discussions and be refined to ultimately reflect shared meaning among DCTF members. The problem statements and objectives below were further revised by the DCTF on day 1 of the San Francisco meeting.

A. Capacity

Straw Problem Statements:

- The focus on early season effort has led to overcapitalization (i.e., many pots per boat) in the fishery.
- The focus on early season effort produces a glut of crab, which lowers the market price.
- The activation of latent permits potentially threatens to increase the number of active permits in the fishery; some fear these permits could be purchased by out-of-state fishermen.
- The collapse of some fisheries and buy out programs or increased restrictions on others, are perceived by some to have increased pressure on crab, causing fishermen to invest more in the fishery.
- The criteria for the California limited entry program was too broad and allowed for too many permits; loose rules allowed boats to expand operations under the same permit which led to overcapitalization of the California fishery.
- The Washington buyback program may cause fleet migration to California (capacity shift)
- A change in the Washington and Oregon start dates may cause fleet migration (capacity shift)
- There is a lack of data on the amount of pots in California waters; we do not know the capacity in California.
- The early sport fishery opening is having an impact on the commercial fishery. Pots are going into the water as part of the recreational effort (especially in district 10); there are different rules for sport pot design; the sport fishery has ill defined regulations.

Straw Objectives:

- Reduce the amount of gear used and associated capitalization by fisherman.
- Reduce or eliminate the potential threat of latent permit activation.
- Define and clarify "latent permit".
- Spread out the volume of catch over a longer time period during the season.
- Change the criteria of the limited entry program (this will limit the number of new permits and prevent vessel expansion under existing permits).

B. Profitability and Equitability

Straw Problem Statements:

- The fleet migrates from Northern California (as well as Oregon and Washington) to district 10, different season start dates and lack of a fair start clause creates an uneven playing field
- Boats from Oregon fish both the Oregon pot limit as well as numerous pots in California simultaneously.
- Early price setting for crab in Oregon negatively affects the ability of California fishermen to negotiate price.
- The majority of landings occur early in the season, leading to a glut of crabs, which leads to lower prices.
- Since most of the catch is frozen, industry is not optimizing the value of the catch.
- The lack of economic incentives for buyers has resulted in the lack of market orders, which limits fishermen's ability to negotiate prices.
- There is loss of landings taxes from California crab being sold in Oregon.
- Landing taxes on crab are low, and are not dedicated to the fishery.

Straw Objectives:

- Create an equitable and even playing field among fishermen operating in district 10 and statewide (e.g., season openers, fair start clause, pot limits).
- Protect California fishers from outside influence and competition from nonresident fishermen.
- Reduce the high number of landings early in the season.
- Optimize the value of the catch.

C. Sustainability of communities and the fishery: Transitioning Away from a Derby dynamic

Straw Problem Statements:

- The need to land early, high-volume catch can create unsafe fishing conditions.
- Many stakeholders in the fishery estimate that 70% - 90% of crab is harvested in the first two to three weeks of the season. This causes a glut of the market, which lowers the price of crab.
- To deal with these high landings in the early season, much of the crab is frozen which decreases the price of the catch.
- The early, high volume catch has resulted in a consolidation of buyers in recent years, thus limiting price negotiation and selling opportunities of fishermen, and creating greater control of the market in the hands of a few buyers.
- The increase in gear is reducing economic opportunities for fishermen and threatening the long-term viability of the industry (i.e. overall catch per unit effort is not profitable).
- There is a lack of crab around Christmas in the bay area, because so much gets harvested around the November opening.
- The early commercial harvest in district 10 negatively affects CPFV vessels.
- Lack of a permanent crab commission in California has prevented a unified approach by the fishing industry to influence the legislature and the Fish and Game Commission.
- Management is not reflecting differences in fleets and markets in different geographic regions in the state.
- There is a complex governance structure (FGC for sport and Legislature for commercial) and resulting inability to rapidly respond to protect and manage the fishery effectively and efficiently.

Straw Objectives:

- Optimize and sustain product value (e.g., implement "even-flow" season).

- Maintain good prices over the course of the season.
- Reduce the “glut” in the early crab season (e.g. grow the live/fresh market).
- Increase the ex-vessel value of crab product (e.g., develop and grow new market opportunities and modify the supply chain).
- Create economic benefits for fishing communities.
- Make the California Dungeness crab fishery the safest fishery in California.