

## Commercial Crabber/Towboat Lane Agreement Meeting

Friday, March 8, 2013  
Port of Astoria Commissioner's Meeting Room  
Astoria, Oregon.



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### Meeting Summary

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#### Opening Remarks and Introductions

Following introductions of those in attendance representing West Coast commercial fishing, tug and barge, and international shipping industries, along with Oregon and Washington Dungeness crab management staff, Steve Harbell, Washington Sea Grant, reviewed discussions during the November meeting and activities since that time. John Corbin, Chair, Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, reported that he will be working to complete an updated list of commercial fishing contacts for Oregon ports; Steve will add these to updated contacts for Washington and then send the final list to towboat company contacts.

#### 12-13 Season Review

##### Compliance – Problems Issues

Industry representatives were asked to comment on compliance problems and other issues for the current season. Pete Nelson, Dunlap Towing, reported that longline gear had been set in the towlane in Oregon, and that crab gear continues to be a problem near Tillamook Head and the entrance to Coos Bay. The entrance to Grays Harbor has also had more crab gear in the lane, along with the Cape Flattery area. This Washington gear may be from the tribal fleet, so Steve will send additional lane information to the Makah, Quileute and Quinault Tribes. Tug skippers again were encouraged to stay within the lanes regardless of gear.

The group discussed an issue with tugs and ships moving out of the channel in the Columbia River, with possible impacts to crab gear. Dan Jordan, Columbia River Bar Pilots Association, and Pete Nelson, Dunlap Towing, indicated that occasionally due to weather or other vessel traffic, ships and tugs may have to navigate just outside the channel lines for safety reasons as allowed under Harbor Safety Committee guidelines. Although crab gear may be impacted, this will continue when necessary.

Fishermen in Oregon will need to be notified that the summer towlane south of the Columbia River will open on April 15<sup>th</sup> rather than the May 25<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Future Action**

- Towlane project information will be sent to tribal fishing representatives in LaPush, Taholah and Neah Bay and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for posting in their licensing office. Jamie Doyle will continue efforts to improve compliance in the Coos Bay area.
- The towlane project will again be listed in NOAA's Coast Pilot to increase awareness and compliance with the lanes.
- Steve will notify fishermen in Garibaldi about the April 15<sup>th</sup> inside lane opening.

#### **Chart Updates/Formats**

Steve reported that the hard-copy version of the towlane chart has been completely updated for 2012 and posted on the Washington Sea Grant website. The electronic chart data sets in Nobeltech, Sea WindPlot and Maptech formats still need to be updated with the new northern Washington towlane data. A new Google Earth format is being explored that would allow greater flexibility in downloading chart coordinates in a variety of navigation equipment formats.

#### **Proposed Changes in Towlanes/Open Fishing Areas**

With changing fishing and tug and barge operations off the coast of Oregon, previous meetings of this group included discussions on a 100-fathom advisory line and possible summer season towlane changes in the area south of the Columbia River. This included a discrepancy with the dates listed as April 15<sup>th</sup> on the Columbia River chart and May 25<sup>th</sup> on charts further south, resulting in an issue late in the season last year. Past discussions included various options, with tug industry representatives indicating their willingness to narrow the lane from two miles currently to just one mile in width. They would also be willing to eliminate all lanes into the minor ports in Oregon including Garibaldi, Newport, Umpqua and Siuslaw, and the inside lane just north of Coos Bay, as well as the south lane into Coos Bay. This would open up additional fishing area for crab gear during the season. In exchange, they would like to be able to use a towlane closer to shore during the entire year, not just late in the season. With more tug traffic now during the winter months, this would be of great benefit.

Pete Nelson, Dunlap Towing, developed a more detailed proposal in December reflecting these ideas, and provided further details to the group. His original proposal was posted on the Washington Sea Grant website, and copies were distributed to meeting participants for their review and comment. The proposal calls for a new year-round lane starting at Point 15 just west of the Columbia River, and extending south to the entrance to Coos Bay. John Corbin expressed support for the proposal because it would increase fishing area and provide a very defined location for tug and barge traffic. Although there would be some conflict with current fishing areas, the new one-mile lane width would be a significant improvement, allowing access to crab on each side of the

lane. Nick Edwards, crab fisherman from Coos Bay, discussed the need to consider greater fishing activity in deeper water within the 100-fathom line, as well as potential conflicts with gear closer to shore with the new proposal. He also recognized the benefits in the new lane proposal, and felt that this would be workable with commercial crab fishermen in his area. Fishermen using the grounds just south of the Columbia River expressed concern about this area, and Pete agreed to move the lane from Point 15 to the current Point 16 further seaward. Jamie Doyle, Oregon Sea Grant, Nick Edwards and Pete Nelson will be meeting in Coos Bay later this month to work out details on the towlane entering Coos Bay and to consider additional lane changes south of Coos Bay to Eureka. They will include representatives from Sause Bros. Towing in Coos Bay in these discussions. The lane change proposal is available for review at:

<http://wsg.washington.edu/mas/econcomdev/lanes.html#proposed>

The group discussed a special project lane into Newport in case tugs needed to access this port. This lane would only be used under special circumstances, with notice provided well in advance to crab fishermen in the area. Pete will develop a proposal for this special project lane.

### **Lost Gear Recovery**

Dan Ayres, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), indicated that new Washington crab gear recovery legislation has allowed a substantial number of pots to be recovered following the closure of the season. There is now an effort to develop an in-season gear recovery program similar to the one in Oregon. The Nature Conservancy has provided funding to Washington coastal tribes for gear recovery, and NOAA continues to examine marine mammal issues with lost crab gear.

John Corbin reported that the Oregon Legislature is considering a post-season gear recovery program similar to Washington's, and that their in-season program is working well.

Crab gear recovery efforts in Oregon and Washington are important for both economic and ecological reasons, and our Commercial Crabber/Towboat Lane Agreement project is a major proactive step by industry to significantly reduce gear loss.

### **Wave Buoys and Marine Weather Forecasting**

Dan Jordan, Columbia River Bar Pilots Association, reported that one of the Columbia River wave buoys broke loose recently and was recovered in Neah Bay by a Foss tug. It has now been re-installed and is operational. The NOAA weather buoy 46089, installed as part of the Coastal Storms Initiatives (CSI) Project 50 miles west of Seaside, is in jeopardy in terms of future funding. CSI is winding down their project work here, and will not be funding the \$40K to \$50K for the annual maintenance required in the future. Under this plan, the buoy would not be replaced or repaired if it were to fail, creating a significant data gap for weather forecasting and direct ocean condition information for mariners. The Bar Pilots Association has been urging decision makers to include support for the buoy under the National Data Buoy Center's budget, as is the case for other

weather buoys in the eastern Pacific. Weather buoy 46005 also failed last fall and has not been repaired as yet.

Dave Elson, National Weather Service (NWS), Portland Office, gave an update on marine weather forecasting improvements and asked the group for feedback on various weather-related products. The Bars webpage will be posted later this month, and new satellite-generated wind data from the International Space Station could be quite valuable when it becomes available next year. Dan Jordan indicated that the webcam information from NWS was very helpful.

Generally ocean buoys off the coast are doing well this year, with the exception of Buoy 46005 (315 NM W of Aberdeen, WA), which is out of service and not likely to be repaired until spring of next year. Dave expressed support for the continuation of the OSI 46089 buoy.

Dave suggested the use of the Bars website:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/marine/workbars.php?site=?>

This will also be available soon on the public page:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr>

Dave or Jeremiah Pyle, NWS, Portland, can be reached at: [dave.elson@noaa.gov](mailto:dave.elson@noaa.gov)  
or [jeremiah.pyle@noaa.gov](mailto:jeremiah.pyle@noaa.gov)

## **Marine Spatial Planning/Ocean Energy**

Scott McMullen, Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee, gave an update on Oregon's ocean energy projects, which are rolling ahead. A huge anchor for the submerged wave energy buoy off Reedsport has been installed in 34 fathoms of water, and two test buoys for the Nemrick and Pemrick systems have been placed off Newport. Nine additional wave buoys have been proposed for the Reedsport site. Oregon will be receiving \$4 million in federal funding for ocean energy projects and is considering a \$25 million bond for cabling systems to bring energy onshore. The Camp Rilea wave energy project is moving forward. Future federal BOEM ocean energy zoning will likely coincide with state project locations.

Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, provided an update on the marine spatial planning process in Washington. Pending state legislation may provide for the creation of a Washington State Coastal Solutions Council, similar to Oregon's Ocean Policy Advisory Council process. Dale will be working for preserving and protecting existing uses off the Washington coast, and he urged tug company representatives to do the same. Washington will not be providing the level of state funding as Oregon has done for ocean energy projects.

**Meeting Adjourned noon**

**Next meeting - Friday, November 8, 2013**

**Port of Astoria Commissioners Room, 10 AM**

**Steve Harbell, Washington Sea Grant**

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