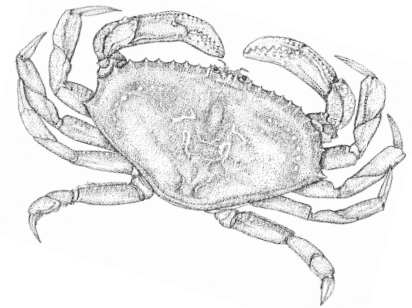


Commercial Crabber/Towboat Lane Agreement Meeting

Friday, March 13, 2015
Port of Astoria Commissioners' Meeting Room
Astoria, Oregon.

Meeting Summary



Opening Remarks and Introductions

Following introductions of those in attendance representing west coast commercial fishing and tug and barge industries, along with Washington Dungeness crab management staff, Steve Harbell, Washington Sea Grant, briefly reviewed discussions during the November meeting and activities since that time.

14-15 Season Review/Compliance Issues

Shipping Traffic

Toby Jacobson, Foss Maritime reported that new 2015 federal fuel regulations, reducing sulfur content from .1% to .01% in fuel for ships operating within 200 miles of the coast, have caused significant problems for ship traffic coast wide. In the Columbia River area alone, six ships have lost propulsion due to fuel issues, with one running aground near the Skamakowa Channel last week. Foss has been involved in assisting a number of these vessels to avert serious problems and additional groundings. Many of these propulsion failures have taken place during shift periods as vessels leave the dock or moorage areas. Jeff Hill, Sause Brothers Towing, reported similar problems in California. Ships are also taking a different heading out of coastal ports to reach the 200-mile point as quickly as possible to limit their use of this more expensive fuel. From the Columbia River, this could mean a heading to the south or west.

Tug and Barge Traffic

Tugs and barges operated by Island Towing may not always be following the towlanes off the central Oregon coast, with vessels sighted using the summer lane during the winter. Steve will contact Island Towing to make sure that they are aware of the lane timing. Pete Nelson, Dunlap Towing and Jeff Hill, Sause Brothers Towing reported crab

gear in the southbound lane out of the Columbia River and off Eureka. Steve asked John Corbin, Oregon Crab Commission, and Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association to check into this. Pete also indicated that longline gear was present in the Oregon winter lane off Aslea two weeks ago. Steve will check on this.

Pete Nelson indicated that Dunlap Towing will continue their operations along the coast including tows between the Columbia River and Coos Bay. The final three pontoons will be towed out of Grays Harbor this year, and the construction site may be converted to a ship repair facility in the future.

Commercial Fishing

Commercial crab industry representatives also reported the Island Towing issue off the Oregon coast. Dan Ayres, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, and Dale Beasley indicated that NOAA staff in Newport, Oregon had contacted them with an offer to compensate fishermen for crab pot losses related to NOAA's recent pursuit of a whale during crab season. In terms of production, fishermen reported that the 2014-15 season was one of the weakest in the last ten years.

Updated Versions of the Towlane Charts

Steve indicated that the charts have not been updated in over four years, and that he has discussed this process with Scott McMullen, Oregon Fishermen's Cable Committee, and requested funding from Washington Sea Grant. This work will include a number of new software formats including Coastal Explorer (Rosebud) and is scheduled for completion before the beginning of the fall crab season. Steve has already completed a process in partnership with the Washington Dept. of Natural Resources to develop the charts in GIS format which is now available on the Washington Sea Grant website.

Proposed Changes in Towlanes/Open Fishing Areas – Oregon Coast

Background:

Steve briefly reviewed the process regarding the proposed changes to the Oregon towlanes. With changing fishing and tug and barge operations off the coast of Oregon, previous meetings of this group included discussions on a hundred fathom advisory line and possible summer season towlane changes in the area south of the Columbia River. 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, Umpqua, and Siuslaw, and the inside lane just north of Coos Bay. This would open up over 175 square miles of additional 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, improving the safety of their operations, and reducing fuel costs. 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 March, 2013 reflecting these ideas, and this original proposal was posted on the Washington Sea

Grant website, with copies distributed to meeting participants for their review and comment. At the two meetings of this group last year John Corbin, Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, 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. At that same meeting in March, 2013 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.

New Modified Proposal:

At the March 2014 meeting, Pete Nelson and Ray Freel, Dunlap Towing, suggested a change in their original proposal to minimize navigation and weather hazards for tugs near the Columbia River. They suggested an alternate one and a half mile wide towlane starting further shoreward than the earlier proposed Point 16, approximately two miles southwest of the CR Buoy (Point 3). Running south, the lane would run approximately parallel to the originally proposed lane to Coos Bay. Towlanes into Newport and Coos Bay would also be included. Pete and Ray have been working with Sause Brothers Towing in Coos Bay on the details of this proposal, including the entrance to Coos Bay.

Dale Beasley, Columbia River Crab Fishermen's Association, expressed support for the proposal because it would increase fishing area and provide a very defined location for tug and barge traffic. Toby Jacobson, Foss Maritime, indicated that the mile and a half width would be acceptable. Coast Guard representatives saw no problems with the proposal.

Discussion at the November 2014 Meeting:

Steve had been working with commercial fishing and tug and barge industry representatives over several months to reach agreement on the proposal. Jamie Doyle, Oregon Sea Grant, had been leading this process in the Coos Bay area to get final agreement from industry representatives there.

Because of the increasing competitiveness of the Dungeness crab fishery, available fishing ground area was of great concern to commercial crabbers, and any potential impact to those areas from increased vessel traffic or ocean energy operations is problematic. The industry in Oregon has already lost important fishing grounds to ocean energy projects and is particularly sensitive to any further reductions. The good news is that our current offshore towlane in Oregon has been working well for commercial crabbers, allowing them full access to open fishing areas near shore free of tug and barge traffic. As such, there is significant resistance to changing the lane location as suggested in the proposal, even though this would simplify tug operations to a single lane year round. Our negotiation and agreement process is based on proposed changes that have benefits to both industries, and clearly the time and fuel savings with this current proposal would be of great value to tug and barge operations. However, after

several months of discussions and negotiations with the commercial crab industry, the benefits to them seem less clear.

Bob Eder, representing Newport crab fishermen, indicated their support for maintaining the current lane configuration. The proposed lane change would affect a significant amount of gear in the area from Cascade Head to Heceta Banks, further reducing access to very productive fishing grounds.

Pete Nelson and Ray Freel, Dunlap Towing, explained that their proposal reflects a need for greater safety and operational efficiency. They have encountered longline and trawl vessels in the winter lane off Newport, are too far offshore for cell phone communication, and configured their new lane proposal to avoid the ocean buoy off Newport and conflicts with other fisheries.

Steve suggested that a compromise location might be possible for the towlane somewhere between the current winter lane and the new proposed lane. Bob indicated that he could discuss this issue with crab fishermen in the Newport area when they have their pre-season meeting on November 19th. He will draft a new lane proposal reflecting the suggestions from commercial crab fishermen on the central Oregon coast and send that modified chart to Steve as soon as possible for review by tug and barge industry representatives.

A new ocean energy test site has also been established off Newport creating a conflict with the entrance towlanes into that port. Although there is very little tug and barge traffic currently, this conflict needs to be resolved. The group reviewed the site location, but needed additional details. Bob Eder agreed to also provide a proposal for the entrance lanes. Tug and barge industry representatives indicated that this might be simplified to a Y-shaped lane as we developed for Humboldt Bay some time ago.

The new lane proposal seems to be acceptable north of Cascade Head and south of Heceta Banks, where there is minimal crab fishing activity. When Bob completes his proposal for the central coast, another draft proposal will be developed encompassing these three areas.

Discussion at This Meeting

Bob Eder, Newport Crab Fishermen's Association reviewed the elements of his new proposal which would:

- maintain the winter and summer lanes,
- move up the opening of the summer lane to April 1st,
- possibly move the winter lane to follow the 100 fathom line,
- define the entrance lanes into Newport, and
- define the towlane running south of Hecata Banks (Points 22 and 23)

After some discussion, Steve summarized the current process. Our negotiation and agreement process is based on proposed changes that have benefits to both industries, and clearly the time and fuel savings with this current proposal would be of great value to tug and barge operations. However, after lengthy discussions and negotiations with the commercial crab industry, the benefits to them seem less clear. We will move forward with the proposed April 1st opening for the summer towlane. Since this also

includes a change in the southern summer lane coming out of the Columbia River, John Corbin and Dale Beasley were asked to check with fishermen to make sure that this is acceptable. We will also define the Newport entrance lanes (see discussion below), and define the lane south of Hecata Banks to Coos Bay. Steve had charted the lane into Coos Bay, which was accepted by tug and barge industry representatives, and Jamie Doyle, Oregon Sea Grant, will check with commercial fishing industry representatives in Coos Bay to make sure that this is acceptable. The new charts will also include a lane running south to Cape Blanco.

Ocean Energy Development

Newport Entrance Lanes

Although tug and barge traffic into and out of Newport, Oregon in the past has been minimal, recent port development may lead to increased traffic in the future. In addition, a recent process related to ocean energy development has established a portion of an ocean energy test site in the existing southern entrance lane. Dan Hellin, Oregon State University, provided some background to the group on this process, and suggested a number of options in relocating the entrance lanes. For the summer towlane, the group agreed with Dan's proposed changes in moving the southern lane slightly to the south to avoid the test site. For the lane connection to the winter lane, Pete Nelson and Jeff Hill expressed concern about running the lane over the Stonewall Banks area, which is extremely shallow given their operational needs. Scott McMullen also indicated that the sea buoy area off Newport now includes several Ocean Observatory Initiatives buoys, which should be avoided. The group suggested extending the summer connecting lanes both north and south, providing a connection to the winter towlane. For the southern lane, this would roughly follow the 17 degree line on Dan's chart. Dan will develop a new lane proposal for review following these recommendations.

Other Oregon Projects

Scott McMullen provided an update on other projects in Oregon. The Camp Rilea wave energy project is moving forward, with buoy deployment last summer, and additional areas planned for development. This may include a large carpet wave energy device.

Marine Spatial Planning

Kevin Decker, Washington Sea Grant, described several upcoming marine spatial planning outreach programs, including a review of the Rhode Island marine spatial planning program. Dale Beasley expressed his concerns regarding the lack of emphasis on protecting existing sustainable uses. With a marine sanctuary, tribal fisheries, and economically important commercial and sport fisheries on the southern coast, Washington is a unique state in terms of further offshore development. Economic losses to the commercial fishing industry have already been substantial. There has been some discussion of fishing reserves off the Washington coast that would provide support for existing uses in highly valued commercial fishing areas.

Marine Weather Forecasting

Tyree Wilde, National Weather Service, Portland Office, gave an update on marine weather forecasting improvements and asked the group for feedback on various weather related products. Staffing at the Portland office has been an issue, but vacant positions have been filled with a focus on critical products and services. Tyree reported that at the suggestion of this group, the marine forecast broadcast has been shortened by 25%.

Tyree indicated that generally ocean buoys off the coast are doing well this year, with the exception of the Newport 46050 buoy that broke free of its mooring and came close to washing ashore and being destroyed. Fortunately, the Coast Guard was able to recover the buoy just two miles from shore. It is currently being repaired and will be re-installed early this summer. He expressed support for the continuation of the Ocean Storms Initiative 46089 buoy, and indicated that funding through the National Buoy Data Center is very likely. A new wave prediction model developed at Oregon State University will be operationally tested in the near future, and will include the Columbia River.

He again suggested the use of the Bars website:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/marine/bar.php>

He can be reached at:

Tyree.wilde@noaa.gov

Meeting Adjourned 11:45

Next meeting - Friday, November 13, 2015

Port of Astoria Commissioners Room, 10 AM

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