

August 4, 2008

To: Interested stakeholders in discussions concerning Dungeness Crab management in California

From: Teresa Schilling, Senator Wiggins' staff; and David Crabbe, consultant to EDF

Re: Crab steering committee meeting held July 29 in Sacramento

This report is intended to keep all interested crab fishermen up to date on discussions about potential improvements to the management of the crab fishery, and summarizes the meeting held July 29 by Senator Wiggins with the support of EDF.

The purpose of the meeting was for the crab steering committee to meet and discuss proposed amendments to the crab bill, SB 1690. The bill passed the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife committee in late June. At that time, the Department of Fish and Game raised objections to the bill and proposed a set of changes primarily concerning stakeholder representation. While DFG's proposed changes have not been formally amended into SB 1690, EDF and Senator Wiggins' staff have been negotiating proposed amendments with DFG. These were the subject of the meeting with the crab steering committee on July 29. DFG representatives Sonke Mastrup and Julie Oltmann were present to outline DFG's concerns and hear from the crab steering committee participants.

We began the steering committee meeting by clarifying the ultimate goal of the steering committee process: to have a bill that retains the hard work and outcomes of the steering committee but can succeed in getting passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. Therefore, addressing the political realities of other stakeholder interests, including DFG's, is critical to the bill's success.

The Department representatives then outlined its proposed changes to SB 1690. DFG expects significant changes ahead for the crab fishery due to such forces as the MLPA process, wave and tidal energy, and increased pressure from the recreational sector. They appreciate the work of the steering committee and recognize the value of taking a proactive approach to addressing the challenges facing the fishery. DFG stated its preference for a comprehensive vision for the fishery, rather than chasing individual fixes. Therefore, they stated their position that the task force must include representatives from other stakeholder groups. These groups would include processors and sport fishing interests as well as Sea Grant, DFG, and non-governmental organizations. Most crab steering committee members objected to having other stakeholders involved since the purpose of the advisory process is to address commercial fishery challenges.

Considering the concerns raised and points made by the Department, the steering committee discussed the proposed amendments in greater detail and had the following recommendations:

1. Define the additional stakeholders as non-voting, ex-officio Task Force members – at least in regards to recommendations on commercial management;
2. Re-clarify the “gear allocation” language to specifically mention trap limits and harvest allocations as some, but not all, of the items the committee would address; and
3. Refine the OPC language to clarify funding for the Task Force would not rely on a new appropriation mandate

Senator Wiggins has sent these recommendations to DFG – we are waiting for a response and hope to know more in the next few days. We expect that compromise # 1 (the definition of non-commercial crab fishery stakeholders as non-voting) may face resistance from DFG.

Finally, the steering committee continued to debate what percentage of the commercial fishery representatives’ vote would be required to constitute a majority. A few steering committee members proposed a final compromise of returning to a two-thirds majority with 17 commercial seats on the task force, if two-thirds of the steering committee could agree to it. David Crabbe is polling the steering committee on this proposal by phone, and will report the results to Senator Wiggins and to the steering committee once the information is available.