

FINAL BILL REPORT

HB 2294

C 9 L 92

Synopsis As Enacted

Brief Description: Directing a study of the coastal crab fishery.

By Representatives Basich, R. King, Wilson, Jones, Sheldon, Orr and Mitchell; by request of Department of Fisheries.

House Committee on Fisheries & Wildlife
Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources

Background: Crab fishing in Washington occurs in Puget Sound, in Washington State waters off of the Washington coast, including Grays Harbor and Willapa Harbor, and in United States waters beyond three miles from the shore. Crab fishing in Washington inside the three mile zone requires a crab pot license from the Department of Fisheries. If fishing takes place beyond the three mile zone, a delivery permit from the department is required to take fish to a port within the state.

Separate crab pot licenses are issued for Puget Sound crab and for "other than Puget Sound" crab. In 1980, in response to an increasing commercial crab fishery in Puget Sound, the Legislature limited entry into only this fishery. Commercial crab licenses may be issued to vessels that held a commercial crab license endorsed for the Puget Sound licensing district during the previous year, or that had a license transferred to the vessel and that had landed 1000 pounds of crab during the previous two-year period ending on December 31 of an odd-numbered year. This latter requirement only affects licenses applied for after January 1, 1984. A maximum of 200 vessels has been set for this fishery.

There is no limit on entry into the commercial crab fishery in Washington coastal waters or in offshore waters. The abundance of crab and the total harvest fluctuate naturally. The harvest per boat, however, has been declining. This is thought to be attributable to an increasing number of crab fishers.

The Washington Department of Fisheries has jurisdiction over the fishery that takes place within three miles of the coast, but must work with the states of Oregon and California to effectively manage fisheries that occur outside of the three mile zone. The Pacific States Marine

Fisheries Commission was authorized by Congress in 1947, and is one of three interstate commissions that serves as a forum for discussion of issues that fall outside of state jurisdiction.

Summary: The Department of Fisheries is directed to participate in a coastwide study of the Dungeness crab fishery, conducted by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and report on:

- (1) the biological status of the coastwide crab resource;
- (2) the optimum number of fishers, vessels, licenses, and gear for the coastal crab fishery;
- (3) the number of fishers, vessels, licenses, and the amount of gear currently used in the coastal crab fishery;
- (4) the feasibility of and need for coordinated and concurrent legislative action by the states of Washington, Oregon, and California to manage the Pacific coastal crab resource;
- (5) the advantages and disadvantages of establishing future limits on the issuance of new Washington coastal crab licenses; and
- (6) the potential for increase in the number of or fishing capacity of coastal crab fishers.

The Department is directed to submit study results and recommendations to the governor and the Legislature by June 30, 1993. Concurrent with their recommendations, the Department of Fisheries shall provide the Legislature with the number of new entrants in the Washington coastal crab fishery after September 15, 1991, the date on which each entrant obtained a coastal crab license, and the number and type of additional Washington commercial fishing licenses held by the new entrant.

The Legislature may consider future limitations on the coastal crab fishery. The Legislature shall review the study conducted by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and determine the appropriate course of action to manage the coastal crab fishery.

A fisher or vessel that obtains a license to participate in the coastal crab fishery on and after September 15, 1991 is informed that the fisher or vessel may be precluded later from participation in the fishery.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 90 0
Senate 44 2

Effective: March 20, 1992