

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5447

---

**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to ensuring a sustainable coastal Dungeness crab fishery.

**Brief Description:** Regarding the coastal Dungeness crab fishery.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senators Hatfield, Jacobsen, Honeyford, Hargrove, Poulsen, Benton and Rasmussen).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/21/07, 3/22/07 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Requires the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to design a voluntary buyback program for the commercial coastal Dungeness crab fishery.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Kagi, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse, Orcutt and Strow.

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

The species commonly known as Dungeness crab exists in commercial quantities from Alaska to central California and lives in waters from the intertidal zone out to a depth of 170 meters. The crab, which is named after the Clallam County community of Dungeness, is the west coast's oldest commercial fishery. The first Dungeness crab fishing season was opened in 1848, just 56 years after Captain George Vancouver founded and named Dungeness, Washington after Dungeness Harbor in England, a community of similar geologic composition located within Romney Marsh in Kent, England.

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Washington has bifurcated its Dungeness crab resource into two commercial fisheries: Puget Sound and coastal waters. Unlike many coastal fisheries which are operated under federal management plans, Congress has authorized Washington, Oregon, and California to manage, with some limitations, the coastal crab fishery in federal waters.

The Legislature and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) have taken measures to limit the growth of the coastal fishery, including limiting entry into the fishery, imposing limitations on the number of pots that may be fished, limiting vessel size and transfers, and pursuing interstate agreements. Most recently, the Legislature required the WDFW to develop and implement a crab buyback program that allows commercial crab fishers to sell their licenses to the state and exit from the fishery. A report from the WDFW summarizing their research and suggestions on the issue was delivered to the Legislature on January 31, 2007.

---

**Summary of Bill:**

The WDFW is directed to design a voluntary buyback program for the commercial coastal Dungeness crab fishery. The developed buyback program will serve as a recommended program, and implementation of the program may not occur until the WDFW is further directed to begin implementation by the Legislature. A report detailing the proposed buyback program must be delivered by December 1, 2007.

The buyback program must be developed with participation from the commercial fleet, and must have as a goal the purchase of between 80 and 100 Dungeness crab-coastal fishery licenses. The recommended program must envision the administrative provisions of the program, any conditions that may be set on the buyback of licenses, and possible funding sources of the license buyback program. The program that is designed must have a neutral impact on crab harvests in Oregon and California's coastal waters.

The WDFW may contract with individuals not employed by the state to assist with developing the program.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Investigating options for a buyback program is part of an extended process that has been underway for over a decade. In the past the Legislature has made the coastal crab fishery a limited entry fishery and has limited the number of crab pots that are allowed. There have also been studies and surveys completed by the WDFW on the fishery.

Buyback programs for other fisheries have had varying degrees of success, but generally have allowed longer harvest seasons, new marketing opportunities, and the ability for families to make a living off of the resource. Actual implementation of a coastal crab buyback program could cost \$50 million.

Recently the coastal crab fishery has experienced record average landings, but crashes to the fishery come without warning.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Hatfield, prime sponsor; Phil Anderson, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Ray Toste, Washington Dungeness Crab Fishermen's Association; and Ed Owens, Coalition of Coastal Fisheries.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.