

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6052

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Fisheries & Wildlife*

Title: An act relating to commercial crab fishing in coastal waters.

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

Sponsor(s): Senators Snyder, Bauer, Sellar, Conner and Rasmussen; by request of Department of Fisheries.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Fisheries & Wildlife, February 20, 1992, DP.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FISHERIES & WILDLIFE**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 11 members: Representatives R. King, Chair; Morris, Vice Chair; Wilson, Ranking Minority Member; Fuhrman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; G. Cole; Haugen; Hochstatter; Orr; Padden; and Spanel.

Staff: Keitlyn Watson (786-7310).

Background:

Crab fishing in Washington occurs primarily in Puget Sound, the Washington coast including Grays Harbor and Willapa Harbor, and the coast beyond three miles from the shore. Crab fishing in Washington inside the three mile zone requires a crab pot license. If fishing takes place beyond the three mile zone, a delivery permit 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 passed a law limiting the harvest of Dungeness crab in this area (RCW 75.30.130). Commercial crab licenses were only issued to vessels that had held a commercial crab license endorsed for the Puget Sound licensing district during the previous year, and that had landed 1,000 pounds of crab during the previous two-year period ending on

December 31 of an odd-numbered year, for licenses applied for after January 1, 1984. A maximum of 200 vessels has been set for this fishery.

No special endorsement is required for crab fishing on the Washington coast or in offshore waters. The Washington Department of Fisheries has jurisdiction over the fishery that takes place within the three mile limit. In 1986, nearly 3.9 million pounds of crab were landed in Washington from the coastal and offshore crab fishery. In 1989, the coastal and offshore crab landings were approximately 21.9 million pounds. The fishery is variable, ranging from 2.5 to 21.9 million pounds harvested annually since 1950. The average long term annual harvest is 8 million pounds. The fleet size was 130-140 boats in the 1970s, and is currently between 180-200 boats.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Fisheries is directed to participate in a coast-wide study of the Dungeness crab fishery, conducted by the Pacific State Marine Fisheries Commission, and to report on:

- (a) the biological status of the coast-wide crab resource;
- (b) the optimum number of fishers, vessels, licenses, and gear in the coastal crab fishery of each state;
- (c) the number of fishers, vessels, licenses, and the amount of gear currently used in the coast-wide crab fishery;
- (d) 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;
- (e) the advantages and disadvantages of establishing future limits on the issuance of new Washington coastal crab licenses;
- (f) and the potential for increase in the number of or fishing capacity of coastal crab fishers.

The department shall submit study results and recommendations to the governor and the Legislature by June 30, 1993.

The Legislature is authorized to consider limitations on 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. The Legislature is required to review the study described in this section and determine the appropriate course of action to manage the coastal crab fishery. Legislative actions that may be considered are described.

Concurrent with their recommendations, the Department of Fisheries is to 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.

An emergency clause is included.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: (Testimony on companion bill HB 2294) This industry is hurting economically, because there are too many fishers. The industry is overcapitalized. It is one of the few commercial fisheries without a moratorium on new license issuance. The resource must be managed with the other involved states in order for management to be effective. Although limited entry or a moratorium is not necessarily the end product, a study will allow an evaluation of the fishery.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: (Witnesses on companion bill HB 2294) Ray Nelson, commercial fisher; Ernie Summers, Washington Dungeness Crab Fishers Association; Gordon Tompkins and Dick Sheldon, Columbia River Crab Fishers Association; and Judith Freeman, Washington Department of Fisheries.