

RCW 77.70.500 Crab pot removal permit—Shellfish pot removal permit—Rules—Penalty. (1)(a) As part of a coastal commercial Dungeness crab pot removal program, the department shall issue a crab pot removal permit that allows the participants in the Dungeness crab-coastal fishery created in RCW 77.70.280 to remove crab pots belonging to state commercial licensed crab fisheries from coastal marine waters after the close of the primary commercial Dungeness crab-coastal harvest season, regardless of whether the crab pot was originally set by the participant or not.

(b) Beginning fifteen days after the close of the primary commercial Dungeness crab-coastal harvest season, any individual with a current commercial Dungeness crab-coastal license and a valid crab pot removal permit issued by the department may remove a crab pot or crab pots used to harvest Dungeness crabs remaining in coastal marine waters after the close of the primary commercial Dungeness crab-coastal harvest season.

(c) In cooperation with individuals with a current commercial Dungeness crab-coastal license, the department may expand the coastal commercial Dungeness crab pot removal program to those areas closed to commercial Dungeness crab harvest prior to the end of the primary season and during that portion of the coastal Dungeness crab fishery that occurs from May 1st through September 15th.

(d) Nothing in this section prohibits the department from exempting certain crab pots from the coastal commercial Dungeness crab pot removal program or from restricting crab pot removal activities to specific geographic areas.

(2)(a) The department may expand the crab pot removal program to allow for the removal of shellfish pots belonging to state commercial or recreational licensed shellfish fisheries from Puget Sound waters during shellfish harvest closures, regardless of whether the shellfish pot was originally set by the permittee or not.

(b) If the department expands the program to Puget Sound waters, the department shall limit the program as necessary to streamline implementation, minimize the oversight burden on fish and wildlife enforcement officers, minimize interference with lawful fisheries and other user groups, minimize administrative overhead cost, and avoid the collection of shellfish pots that are not abandoned. The program may be limited as deemed appropriate by the department, including limitations on:

(i) The number of participants;

(ii) The eligible geographic areas in Puget Sound where shellfish pots may be recovered;

(iii) The types of shellfish pots that may be recovered;

(iv) The maximum or minimum depth where a shellfish pot must be located to be eligible for recovery; and

(v) The ports through which the vessels collecting the abandoned shellfish pots may operate.

(3) The department may adopt rules to implement subsections (1) and (2) of this section.

(4)(a) The following are exempt from complying with the lost and found property provisions in chapter 63.21 RCW:

(i) An individual participating in permitted crab pot removal activities in coastal marine waters who has a valid crab pot removal permit, and who adheres to the provisions of the permit as they relate to crab pot removal; and

(ii) An individual participating in permitted shellfish pot removal activities in Puget Sound waters who has a valid shellfish pot removal permit and who adheres to the provisions of the permit as they relate to shellfish pot removal.

(b) The individual who removes a shellfish pot under a valid crab pot removal permit or a valid shellfish pot removal permit takes the property free and clear of all claims of the owner or previous holder and free and clear of all individuals claiming ownership under the previous owner.

(5) A violation of this section, or any rules or permit conditions provided under this section, is punishable as provided in RCW 77.15.750.

(6) Individuals who remove shellfish pots under a valid crab pot removal permit or a valid shellfish pot removal permit in accordance with this section are not subject to permitting under RCW 77.55.021. [2020 c 172 s 1; 2010 c 193 s 3; 2009 c 355 s 1.]