



Photos by Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Bornstein Seafoods employees unload Dungeness crab from the Katrina crabbing boat on Monday docked at Pier 2 in Astoria.

Crab: 'Everyone started at once this year because of the strike'

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Amos Johnson, a deckhand aboard the Cathy H in Warrenton, said the glut of crab coming in has also led to a shortage of seafood totes, causing processors to discourage some fishermen from going out again immediately, or placing them on catch limits.

Many crab fishermen didn't start dropping pots until Jan. 4 and bringing in crab until Jan. 7, after ending a strike and compromising with processors on a wholesale price of \$2.87 per pound, below the \$3 crabbers started at last year.

"Everyone started at once this year because of the strike, so they didn't have enough totes to go around from coast to coast," he said. "Westport (Washington) ran out of totes. Newport ran out of totes. We had to wait to offload because they didn't have totes for us."

Domoic acid worries

Domoic acid, a neurotoxin produced by algae in warm waters and poisonous to humans, has wreaked havoc on the Dungeness crab fishery and the demand of one of the biggest customers: China.

Under the best of circumstances, crabbing can start Dec. 1 in Oregon and Washington state. But high levels of domoic acid delayed the start from California north to Cape Blanco until Dec. 18, and north of Cape Blanco until Jan. 1.

Hubbard said that because the Chinese often eat the viscera of Dungeness crab, which the U.S. Food and Drug Adminis-



Dungeness crab is unloaded from the Katrina on Monday at Pier 2.

tration warns against, the country has lower allowable thresholds for domoic acid.

Undercurrent News, which covers the seafood industry, reported late last month that Chinese regulators had effectively shut down imports of live Dungeness crab after expanding testing for domoic acid to one out of three crab shipments from the entire West Coast. The increased testing acted as a soft ban, Undercurrent News reported, because sellers were too worried about shipments of crab dying before they could be inspected.

"It constrained a lot of international trade when they stopped buying," Fick said.

Hubbard said the wholesale price of crab started at \$3 last year and increased to \$6 based on the demand of the Chinese, who he added bought about 35 percent of the catch on the West Coast. This year, he said, fishermen will be lucky if the Chinese buy 10 percent of the crab, meaning an increase in prices is much less likely.

Just as good fishing weather helped lead to a glut of crab on the market, the gale-force winds and heavy seas predicted this week might help processors catch up.

Hubbard said his crew doesn't expect to go back out until next week. "In three days, the canneries will all be caught up."



Dungeness crab are sorted by employees on Monday at Fishhawk Fisheries in Astoria.

ODOT: 'The department really does need to be shaken up'

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state law gives it broad powers to run the department.

But several observers say the letter speaks volumes about tensions and potential flaws in oversight, even as the department prepares for a massive influx of funding for road and bridge projects if the Legislature approves a package of increased fees and taxes.

"Wow," said Catherine Mater, who held Baney's position until 2015, as the letter was read to her over the phone. Considering that ODOT staff ostensibly work for the commission, Mater said the request for an independent staffer indicates "a complete disintegration of trust" between ODOT and the commission tasked with overseeing it.

David Bragdon, former president of greater Portland's Metro regional government, has closely watched ODOT for years. The letter "reads like a vote of no confidence in (ODOT) management," said Bragdon, who is executive director of Transit Center, Inc, a nonprofit.

"This is a pretty darn amazing letter," said Jim Moore, a Pacific University government professor who leads the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation. The fact that it was put on official letterhead suggests it was meant "for a wider audience and that the letter was intended to put pressure on the governor," he said.

Gov. Brown wrote a non-committal reply Friday. She did not comment on Baney's specific requests but expressed appreciation for the commission's role.

"Your involvement and continued communication with my office is key to the active and critical role OTC plays in the efforts to create a robust transportation system," Brown wrote.

Bryan Hockaday, a Brown spokesman, said the governor's response was not a denial of Baney's requests but declined to comment further.

Specifically, Baney wants to increase the commission's oversight of the budget, participation in project selection, tracking of funds within the department and development of policy from the beginning stages.

For instance, Baney said she would like the commission to decide what percentage of funds are spent on road maintenance, bridge replacement and other items.

"Ten years ago, the director used to report to the transportation commission," Baney said in a phone interview. "The governor now oversees the director, but at the same time, the transportation commission is to carry out the oversight of the agency. The director carries out the administration of the day-to-day operations. There isn't a place for us to have a voice in how that is going."

'Bright line'

Baney's letter referenced an October workshop of the commission in which Baney and others called for more active oversight by the OTC. Garrett, in the meeting, responded that a "bright line" should separate his day-to-day leadership of the depart-



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The chairwoman of the Oregon Transportation Commission has written a letter to Gov. Kate Brown requesting greater oversight of the Department of Transportation.

ment and the commission's "higher policy activities."

When contacted on Friday, Garrett said he had "no issues" with Baney's request. "Should this direction be taken, I stand ready to productively engage it," Garrett wrote in an email.

Baney's letter follows years of heightened turmoil and skepticism around ODOT.

In 2015, lawmakers questioned ODOT estimates about an earlier transportation proposal that provided inaccurate estimates of climate change impacts. The department has been buffeted by questions about cost overruns, conflicts of interest and management's decade-long rejection of internal staff and federal recommendations to bolster highway construction oversight.

Mater was removed by Gov. Kitzhaber after questioning a project that she concluded showed signs of fraud. She said ODOT gives commissioners little choice but to "rubber stamp" decisions, adding that she probably would have pursued the same sort of changes as Baney if she'd stayed.

"In my opinion, the department really does need to be shaken up," Mater said. "The commission needs to have much more active involvement in what happens with these projects and where the money is spent, quite frankly — and that simply has not happened up to this point."

Millions more in funding

ODOT is positioned to receive hundreds of millions of dollars in potential transportation funding from the state Legislature later this year. At the request of lawmakers, Brown earlier this year ordered an independent review of ODOT's management to ensure the agency is prepared to efficiently manage the influx of money. The nearly \$1 million review by New York-based McKinsey & Co. is scheduled for completion by the end of February.

"I realize that what I am proposing ... represents significant change in the way we currently carry out the state's business regarding our transportation system and policies," Baney wrote in the letter. "I believe that these changes are essential to meet the rightful expectations of all Oregonians and to gain their support for the right solutions to our state's very challenging transportation issues."

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group. Nick Budnick is a reporter for the Portland Tribune.

South Wind: Council will review master plan

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South Wind is vacant except for a water tank and a building used for emergency supply storage. The property needs a new road access, since its current highway access is a logging road. Sewer service could be extended beneath Highway 101 and the water tank could be connected to the system in the Haystack Heights neighborhood.

South Wind was annexed into city limits but is outside the urban growth boundary. Urban development cannot be approved and urban services cannot be extended to the site unless the boundary is amended.

"The reasoning for not

jumping ahead with the UGB is that we still don't have a really strong picture of what we're doing there," said Mayor Sam Steidel, adding that there were still questions about funding.

City Planner Mark Barnes recommended that the council wait to amend the boundary. Urban growth boundaries are usually amended when development is imminent, he said.

"From our point of view, there's no urgency in getting it done now rather than waiting for you to take a closer look at the master plan," Barnes said.

Councilors agreed that an engineering study would provide updated infrastructure construction cost estimates and a better idea of what could be

done on the site.

Steidel asked if the engineering work could be broken down into parts. Barnes said it was possible to plan the transportation part of the project separate than water and sewer services.

"If you're in a hurry to have this done sooner, putting this in the next fiscal year budget would get that started quicker," Barnes said.

The city has \$500,000 in the general reserve fund that could be used for an engineering study, City Manager Brant Kucera said. The funds would be available in July.

"What concerns me is that if this is to become a larger mass care site in case of a disaster,

there's a point where we keep kicking the can down the road and never get around to developing that infrastructure," Kucera said.

The council will hold a work session to review the South Wind master plan.

In February, while developing the proposed fiscal year budget, the city plans to dedicate \$400,000 of general fund resources to the general reserve fund specifically for relocating critical city functions.

The city will continue to do this each February for four more years, according to the city's strategic plan. Cannon Beach plans to have \$2 million in reserve by 2021 for moving critical city functions.

GMO apples: More than 300,000 trees will be planted this spring

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About 500, 40-pound boxes of sliced apples will be sold in grab-and-go pouch bags, he said. The company expects to offer 6,000 boxes of apple slices from the 2017 fall crop.

A QR computer scan code on the packaging enables consumers to get information,

including that the apple slices are genetically modified, but nothing directly on the packaging identifies it. Okanagan Specialty Fruits will adhere to the new genetically engineered foods labeling act but it's not clear what that requires, Carter said.

"We are selling it under the Arctic brand and we've had a lot of press and attention, so I

assume most people will know what it is," he said.

The company has reworked its logo, making a snowflake inside an apple outline more visible.

The first commercial test marketing will provide the company with consumer preferences on packaging and price and other information including purchase motivations. Sur-

vey data will be used to help the company decide its fall commercial launch strategy.

The company has orchards in British Columbia and 85,000 trees at an undisclosed location in Washington state. More than 300,000 trees will be planted this spring and 500,000 are being budded for planting in 2018. Those numbers may increase, as the company wants

enough volume to compete nationally in the sliced apple business, Carter said.

The goal is 800 to 1,000 acres planted in the Northwest and nearly the same acreage in the eastern U.S. in addition to 600 to 800 acres in Canada by 2021, he has said. It will be a mix of company orchards and contract growers.

While supportive of the sci-

ence, the Washington apple industry opposed approval of GMO apples because it believes negative public perception could damage apple sales. While expressing concerns about market disruption before USDA approval, the U.S. Apple Association is now neutral and stresses that all apples are safe, healthy and nutritious.