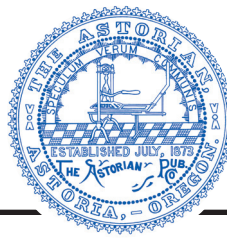


OPINION

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the Astorian

Founded in 1873

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GUEST COLUMN

Crabbers face new rules to protect whales

Oregon's commercial crabbing industry prides itself on sustainability.

Though Dungeness crab has been harvested commercially since the late 1800s, this population is considered to be stable to increasing along the West Coast — thanks to commercial and recreational regulations that protect the breeding population and ensure the state's official crustacean will be conserved for future generations.



CAREN BRABY

Now, the fishing industry is facing a new environmental challenge — whale entanglements in crabbing gear.

Before 2014, such entanglements were rare, numbering about 10 annually off the entire

West Coast. Since then, entanglements have become more common, peaking at 55 in 2015 and numbering 46 off the West Coast last year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Forensics of each entanglement tell us that about half of them can be attributed to fishing gear, a third to Dungeness crab gear. Most of the crabbing gear entanglements are attributed to California fisheries, but Oregon gear has been confirmed in several entanglements over the past few years.

Whales can be disentangled in some cases, and fishermen and other ocean users know to immediately report incidents to a hotline or hail the U.S. Coast Guard to initiate a response from NOAA's disentanglement team.

What's behind the increase since 2014 and how can we prevent entanglements from happening in the first place?

Changes in ocean conditions, including climate change and effects from "the blob" (a marine heatwave in the Pacific Ocean), are likely factors in the increase as they are changing where and when whales migrate and feed off the Oregon Coast.

Both questions are ones the industry itself is committed to answering.

First, the commercial crabbing industry via the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission is helping fund aerial surveys of whales off the Oregon Coast. This project is a partnership between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Sea Grant and Oregon State University's Marine Mammal Institute, relying on Coast Guard collaboration, to gather information about where and when whales are in Oregon waters and their activities when they are here.

In combination with our knowledge of where and when fishing occurs,



Mark Farley/Oregon State University

Leigh Torres, with Oregon State University's Marine Mammal Institute, on board a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter for an aerial survey of whales off the Oregon Coast.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will hold public meetings to hear feedback from the commercial fleet on regulations to prevent whale entanglements.

- **Coos Bay**/Thursday, North Bend Library, 1-4 p.m.
- **Brookings**/Friday, Harbor Water District Building, 9 a.m.-noon
- **Astoria**/Oct. 22, Holiday Inn Express & Suites, 1-4 p.m.
- **Newport**/Oct. 23, Shilo Inn, 1-4 p.m.

these resulting whale maps will help us assess the seasons and areas of greatest risk of interactions that lead to whale entanglement.

Industry members have also been part of the Oregon Sea Grant-led Oregon Whale Entanglement Working Group since its inception in 2017. The working group has been critical in raising awareness and understanding of the problem and potential solutions.

It has promoted the "best practices directive," which describes fishing gear configurations and practices that

are thought to decrease the risk of whale entanglements — such as minimizing surface gear, maintaining taut vertical lines that are less likely to entangle marine life and talking to each other on the water so everyone knows when and where there is whale activity and voluntarily avoids those areas.

The industry is also active in derelict gear removal, both in-season and post-season, an incentive program that further reduces the risk of entanglements.

While these efforts have led to success, more problem-solving and effort are needed as entanglements are still happening at an unacceptable level. California's high rate of entanglements recently prompted a lawsuit and settlement that closed California's crabbing season several months early in 2019.

In Oregon, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Fish and Wildlife Commission are taking a phased approach to additional regulatory measures, and many of these efforts have widespread industry support from commercial crabbers.

The first phase requires better identification of crabbing gear to more readily track what type of gear whales are getting entangled in. Beginning this season, all commercial ocean and Columbia River crab permit holders must register their

buoy color patterns with the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Recreational crabbers will also be required to mark their buoys.

While these first-phase measures are critical for our understanding of entanglements, they will not reduce the risk of entanglement. Phase two regulatory measures may involve reducing the amount of vertical lines — such as from crab pots — in the water during certain times of year. We know there is an increase in entanglements reports along the West Coast starting in the spring, which coincides with when Endangered Species Act-listed humpbacks are most abundant off the Oregon Coast.

Exact phase two measures won't be decided by the commission until spring, but the Department of Fish and Wildlife is hosting public meetings now to get input from the crab fleet.

While designing these regulatory changes is expected to be difficult, the crab fishery has faced change before and retained its place as one of Oregon's most sustainable fisheries. This new challenge requires true leadership and innovation, and the crab fleet is up to this challenge.

Caren Braby is the marine resources program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Impressed

I had an opportunity to talk with state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell early on in the campaign. At that time, I was impressed with her understanding and loyalty to the working people of this district.

Her own life experience informed the values which she articulated. That focus has not changed with her time in Salem. Tiffany acted on promises to support working families in the district, invest in education and take real action to protect our environment.

Rep. Mitchell went to the Legislature, studied issues and learned how our state pension structure is affecting current and future budgets. She addressed the impacts of climate change on the health of Oregon's environment, and on our future jobs. It became clear to her that we cannot continue as we have in the past.

She learned how complex the job of legislating and creating change really is. In acting on what she had learned, she angered certain industries and some of her supporters. Still, she acted on the values which caused her to run. She deserves our support for her active analysis and those hard choices she made.

Some people are now collecting signatures advocating her recall, a solution rarely used, and then only for criminal or blatantly unethical behaviors. If her adversaries simply disagree with her positions, running a candidate in the next election is the appropriate action. It wouldn't cost the taxpayers extra expense, and waste our employee's time and energy.

Who is it, anyway, funding this recall effort with all the decals and signs? I'm wondering: are you?

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Disheartened

I am disheartened by efforts to recall House District 32 Rep. Tiffany Mitch-

ell. Recalls are meant to be an instrument for removing an elected official for committing malfeasance.

There is not even a whisper of evidence to suggest that Mitchell has done anything of the sort. Instead, members of the lobbying group, #TimberUnity, disagree with her vote in support of the controversial cap-and-trade bill (House Bill 2020) in the recent legislative session.

I actually share some of their concerns about the potential for job loss, particularly in our rural, natural resources-based economy. But recalling an elected official because you disagree with her voting record subverts our democratic system.

I urge you not to sign the petition to get the recall on the ballot. If you want to "recall" Mitchell, you will have your chance in one year. It's called the ballot box.

JOAN HERMAN
Astoria

Now what?

Maybe you didn't support the cap-and-invest climate bill that got defeated in the last legislative session. Now what? Are you going to be part of

the solution, or part of the problem?

Instead of wasting time and taxpayer money on an election do-over, let's decide on a plan to avoid climate change consequences. Many of our neighbors and elected leaders are already working on this.

We already know our ocean is acidifying, and there is another dead-zone blob right off of our coast. Our fisheries and our economy depend on a healthy ocean.

We need to work together and prioritize solving climate change for the safety and health of our families.

BEBE MICHEL
Gearhart

Puzzled

All U.S. citizens have a protected right to voice their opinions. What puzzles me is why the organized effort to recall Tiffany Mitchell, our district's state representative, is spreading so much misinformation and distortions about her record.

When faced with tough decisions, she has consistently opted for the long-term good of her constituents, knowing it may not be popular with some. To those who will listen, she can explain the difficult

and complex process she goes through to arrive at the votes she casts.

She is not an enemy of unions, but a strong supporter.

We are very fortunate to have such an intelligent, hardworking representative who is so dedicated to public service. Please do not be fooled by the widespread misinformation.

CAROLYN EADY
Astoria

Determination

Rep. Tiffany Mitchell has been serving the people in House District 32 with energy and determination. With her working family background, and her passion for preserving the great Northwest, we know we can depend on her judgment in the Legislature.

Why is this ridiculous recall petition being circulated? It is a misuse of the Oregon recall system, which was never intended to challenge elected officials simply because you disagreed with them. Do your own research, and ignore that petition. That's just big money trying to fool you.

Portland's Andrew Miller of Stimson Lumber spent more than \$1 million on political contributions in a single year, just to avoid doing the right thing.

In May, he laid off more than 60 Forest Grove workers in response to a tax increase to fund Oregon schools. His company grossed nearly \$224 million in 2018. The total number of employees is now listed at 42.

He and Julie Parrish, of West Linn, are ramming this campaign down our throats for one reason: Money. Lots of it.

This is not a matter of left vs. right. This is powerful companies telling threatening lies to workers just to manipulate them into supporting an irresponsible corporate agenda. That's not politics, that's deception.

KEN POTTER
Cannon Beach

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mention-

ing the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters in poor taste will not be printed.

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