

ITEM 18
MANAGER'S REPORT NO. 38
COUNCIL MEETING 89/05/23

RE: LETTER FROM VILLAGE OF BELCARRA WHICH APPEARED ON THE AGENDA FOR APRIL 10 (7)
COMMERCIAL CRAB FISHING IN INDIAN ARM

MUNICIPAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT the recommendations of the Director Recreation & Cultural Services be adopted.

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TO: MUNICIPAL MANAGER 1989 MAY 16
FROM: DIRECTOR RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES
RE: LETTER FROM THE VILLAGE OF BELCARRA REGARDING COMMERCIAL CRAB FISHING
IN INDIAN ARM

PURPOSE: To report on the results of an analysis of the position taken by the Village of Belcarra and to recommend a course of action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Burnaby Council submit a letter to the Honorable Tom Siddon, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, expressing concern for the crab population in Indian Arm and requesting that a study be initiated to include, but not necessarily limited to, the five objectives as noted in Section 5.0 of this report.
2. THAT copies of this report be forwarded to:
Mayor and Council - City of Port Moody
Mayor and Council - District of North Vancouver
Mayor and Council - Village of Belcarra
Rick Hankin, Manager - Regional Parks, G.V.R.D.

REPORT

1.0 SUMMARY

At its meeting of 1989 April 10 Council received a copy of a letter from from the Village of Belcarra sent to The Honorable Tom Siddon, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, expressing concern over the depletion of crab stocks in Indian Arm. The Village is requesting the Ministry to discontinue commercial crab fishing in Belcarra and Bedwell Bays to allow only recreational crabbing.

Staff have accessed this position and speculate that, while commercial crab fishing may be depleting the crab stocks, the issue is much more complex and deserves further study before definitive conclusions can be drawn. Most definitely recreational crab fishing along Barnet Beach and the entire Indian Arm is a significantly valuable recreational opportunity.

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However, properly managed, commercial crab fishing is a viable industry highly compatible with other uses in the inlet. Its activity should be supported and encouraged until such time that it has been demonstrated to cause a reduction in the population. Other factors, such as overfishing by recreational fishermen, loss of suitable habitat or degradation of environmental quality could be contributing to the apparent decline in stocks either individually or in combination. What is urgently needed now is an evaluation of the crab population, an assessment of both the recreational and commercial harvest rates, and better regulation and enforcement to ensure that a sustainable population exists into the future.

2.0 COMMERCIAL CRABBING INDUSTRY

According to the Municipal Clerk, The Village of Belcarra has been raising concern for a declining crab population for several years based on numerous public complaints. This concern for a decline in the population has been expressed by a number of agencies and individuals recently contacted who are familiar with the crab fishery in the inlet. Further, it is the assessment of the Federal Fisheries and Oceans Ministry, who is responsible for the administration of the recreational and commercial crabbing industry including licensing, inspections, setting regulations and enforcement, that concern may be warranted but they do not have enough data to verify the concerns or confirm the cause of the decline. The issue is more complex than simply assuming that industry is to blame for the decline.

The commercial crabbing industry has been going on for many years. Currently it consists of three to four boats on a regular basis and two boats on an occasional basis. The areas fished include Deep Cove, along Cates Park in North Vancouver, along Barnet Beach and Bedwall Bay. Belcarra Bay, one of the sites mentioned by the Village of Belcarra, is not fished commercially according to the Federal Fisheries Department spokesperson, nor is Vancouver Harbour.

The commercial harvest is regulated and occasionally inspected but there is presently no limit on the catch and the inspections are conducted irregularly, thus there is not enough firm knowledge of its daily operations. In addition, detailed records on the size of catch are not kept so it is impossible to quantify any historical trends in population changes. However, one factor suggesting a declining population is the increasing amount of fishing effort per unit of catch suggesting that in fact the crab population is declining. The Fisheries spokesman estimated that as much as 200 pounds of crabs are taken daily by each boat. Certainly, that harvest rate has the potential to cause a decline when coupled with other mitigating factors.

3.0 RECREATIONAL CRAB FISHING

There are no accurate counts on the numbers of crabs taken by sport fishermen although it is estimated to be comparable to the commercial harvest during the summer months. The situation is aggravated by the facts that the sports fishermen take undersized crabs and frequently exceed the quota limit. The Federal Fisheries spokesman said that they may issue as many as 500 ticket violations per year and estimate that perhaps as many as 1500 crabs are taken illegally per week. Thus, in addition to the need for more information on the population dynamics of the crabs and the harvest rates by both commercial and recreational fishermen, there is also a need for more regulation and enforcement. Fisheries authorities feel that at present they do not have the manpower to adequately enforce the regulations.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL PARAMETERS

The final factor to consider is that the population decline may not be attributable to the harvest rate but instead is a result of a decline in environmental quality or loss of habitat.

The Federal Fisheries Authority said that the Ministry does not monitor water quality conditions to determine whether or not it is suitable to the crab population nor do they know the location of the main breeding grounds of the two crab species in question. It is possible that a breeding ground is being lost through development in the inlet.

5.0 RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

According to a researcher at Simon Fraser University, a crash in the crab population did occur in the Queen Charlotte Islands as a result of both over harvest and habitat destruction. Also, the crab populations in Puget Sound were being depleted by over harvesting which forced the resource management authorities to develop a stringent management program. A similar type of program is now needed here.

A complete review of the crab populations and the industry should be undertaken by the Federal Fisheries and Oceans Ministry to ensure that a sustainable crab population is maintained into the future. While it is tempting to speculate that the decline is a result of the commercial harvest, such an assumption should be confirmed. The review should include:

- determination of the current state of the population
- assessment of the factors affecting the populations
- identifications of key habitats that may be threatened by development
- a review of the harvest quotas of both recreational and commercial fishermen
- an improvement in the enforcement of the regulations including public education

The goal of the review should be to develop a management program that allows both commercial and recreational fishermen to share the resource without causing a decline in the population. It may be necessary to close the entire inlet to all crab fishing for a period of time to allow the population to rebound.

6.0 RESPONSE BY OTHER AGENCIES

The Village of Belcarra circulated copies of their letter to The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to two other municipalities surrounding the inlet and to G.V.R.D. Parks Department. Their response to that letter is noted below:

City of Port Moody:

The City of Port Moody sent a letter to The Village of Belcarra supporting their request for a ban on commercial fishing.

District Of North Vancouver:

The District of Vancouver Council received the information but did not take any action.

G.V.R.D. Parks Department:

The G.V.R.D. Parks Department is taking an approach similar to the one being recommended to Council.

At the present time they are not supporting a ban on commercial fishing until more information is available. They hold the same expectation that the Federal Fisheries Ministry is obligated to collect whatever information is needed to ensure the populations survival into the future.

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7. CONCLUSION

Crab fishing in Indian Arm should continue to support both recreational use and a small scale commercial operation. With sufficient knowledge, improved regulations and increased enforcement, Federal Fisheries Authorities should be able to manage the crab populations so that both operations coexist.

A complete evaluation of the health of the crab population and factors causing the population decline is needed to attain this goal. Calling for a permanent ban on the commercial harvest is premature at this point until the study is complete.

A temporary but complete closure to all harvests may be warranted until the crab population returns to sustainable levels.



for
D. GAUNT
DIRECTOR RECREATION AND
CULTURAL SERVICES

JK:cs

cc: Environmental Health
Director Planning and Building Inspection