

Iconic Oregon Dungeness crab fishery receives MSC sustainability certification

December 2, 2010 (Seattle, WA) — The iconic Oregon Dungeness crab (*Cancer magister*) fishery operating off the west coast of the United States has earned Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification following independent assessment to the MSC standard for sustainable, well-managed fisheries. Products from the fishery will now be eligible to bear the blue MSC ecolabel.

Dungeness crab is Oregon's official 'state crustacean' and the crabs have been harvested commercially along the Pacific coast since the late 1800's. This species ranges from central California to the Gulf of Alaska, and has long been part of the Northwest's seafood heritage. Dungeness crab is Oregon's most valuable single species fishery. Oregon's harvest for the 2009-2010 season was 23,195,059 pounds (10,521 metric tons) and the landed value was \$44.8 million. Dungeness crab landings, however, are naturally cyclical.

The Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission is the fishery client, with 425 limited entry license holders fishing primarily within 10 miles of the Oregon coast. Dungeness crabs are harvested using steel pots at depths ranging between nine and 146 meters. Oregon is currently the top producer of Dungeness crab worldwide, and product is sold live, or as fresh or frozen whole cooked crabs, as well as picked meat, legs and sections. Dungeness crab is shipped to markets around the world—with the United States being the major market.

Fishing occurs between December and mid-August, with the majority of production occurring during the first eight weeks of the commercial fishing season. A state managed fishery, Oregon's Dungeness crab is regulated by size, sex and season, with only males meeting a minimum size standard harvested. Under-sized males and all females are returned to the water unharmed.

In the course of the MSC assessment process, the fishery client worked with academic experts to produce improvements such as:

- An ongoing monitoring plan which includes measuring female fertilization and abundance rates to produce an estimate of an index of female abundance.
- An age-structured productivity model as a means to assess fishing effort and size limit, which is used to estimate potential Target Reference Points.
- A proposed Limit Reference Point based on declining catch over time in successive generations, adjusting from a California value to one specific to Oregon.

"We are very happy to have successfully completed the certification process and join the other fisheries in Oregon and around the world that have earned this important sustainability designation," said Nick Furman, executive director of the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission. "We anticipate that the MSC label will create new marketplace opportunities and recognition for 'Oregon Dungeness' as awareness of and demand for certified seafood products grows."

“The Oregon Dungeness crab fishery has demonstrated that they are a model fishery in terms of environmental sustainability and working hard to maintain and improve the overall health of the fishery,” said Kerry Coughlin, regional director for MSC Americas. “They have accomplished significant improvements already and have committed to even more progress as part of their MSC certification. We are pleased to have this important fishery in the MSC program and are confident consumers will welcome this source of delicious, and now certified sustainable, Dungeness crab.”

Scientific Certification Systems was the certifier for this assessment. During the assessment, the three principles of the MSC standard were evaluated in detail: the status of the fish stock, the impact of the fishery on the marine ecosystem and the management system overseeing the fishery. More information about the Oregon Dungeness crab fishery and the complete Public Certification Report detailing the fishery’s passing scores against the MSC standard can be found on MSC’s web site at www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified.

About the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

The MSC is an international nonprofit organization set up to promote solutions to the problem of overfishing. The MSC runs the only certification and ecolabeling program for wild-capture fisheries consistent with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards and the United Nations FAO guidelines for fisheries certification. The FAO “Guidelines for the Eco-labeling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries” require that credible fishery certification and ecolabeling schemes include:

- Objective, third-party fishery assessment utilizing scientific evidence
- Transparent processes with built-in stakeholder consultation and objection procedures
- Standards based on the sustainability of target species, ecosystems and management practices.

The MSC has offices in London, Seattle, Tokyo, Sydney, The Hague, Edinburgh, Berlin, Cape Town, Paris and Stockholm.

In total, more than 230 fisheries are engaged in the MSC program with 102 certified and 131 under full assessment. Another 40 to 50 fisheries are in confidential pre-assessment. Together, fisheries already certified or under full assessment record annual catches of close to seven million metric tons of seafood, representing more than 12 percent of global capture production for direct human consumption. The fisheries already certified catch nearly four million metric tons of seafood—more than seven percent of the total global capture production for direct human consumption. Worldwide, more than 7,000 seafood products, which can be traced back to the certified sustainable fisheries, bear the blue MSC ecolabel. For more information, visit www.msc.org.

###

Media contact:

Micaela Vivero
Communications Manager—Americas
Marine Stewardship Council
(Seattle, WA)
Email: micaela.vivero@msc.org
Phone: +1-206-691-0188, ext. 104