



California Department of Fish and Wildlife Message to Commercial Fishermen on Dungeness Crab Opener

March 24, 2016

We at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) would like to share our appreciation of your patience in dealing with the most unusual and stressful situation of the delay in the California Dungeness crab fishery due to high levels of domoic acid.

As of March 26, 2016, commercial Dungeness crab fishing is open in all areas south of the Mendocino/ Sonoma county line. We continue to work with CDPH and OEHHA on the remaining closed areas and will notify the industry when those areas are safe to open.

This opportunity does not come without its own challenges. We have never operated the fishery under these circumstances and will be monitoring activity to make sure things go well and that we learn from this experience in the unfortunate case we find ourselves here again in the future. In that spirit we want to highlight a few issues that warrant your attention.

Some in the fleet have expressed concern about soft shelled crab and excessive mortality.

The current season end dates (July 15 north of District 10, June 30 District 10 south) for the fishery were established over 50 years ago with the intent of avoiding the time period when males molt. The Director also has the authority to extend the season if it is determined that this will not damage the resource pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 8277. This was implemented recently during the 2012-13 season for the Northern Management Area, which was extended for an additional four weeks. Molting normally occurs between late summer and early fall prior to the season start date, however changing ocean conditions could affect the timing of this.

If there is a concern over the take of soft-shelled crab during this delayed season, the fleet should avoid taking crab that are not marketable and abide by Fish and Game Code Section 7704 that makes it unlawful to cause or permit waste of a fished resource. We encourage fishermen, buyers and processors to closely coordinate to minimize the chance of wasting any crab and violating Fish and Game Code Section 7704.

Some fishermen and members of industry have expressed concern about the potential concentrated effort in the Dungeness crab fishery upcoming opener coinciding with whale migration and increased chances of whale entanglement, as well as conflicts with other fisheries gear.

Recent reports of whale entanglement incidents with Dungeness crab fishing gear in California have been increasing and although they occur throughout the year, they generally increase in frequency during the spring months. In seasons past, fishing effort declines this time of year. The delayed opening of this year's season and potentially increased fishing effort in the spring could increase negative interactions with whales. CDFW recommends that all fishermen refer to the [Best Practices Guide](#) for tips on how to fish crab trap gear to reduce incidences of whale entanglements this fishing season.

The delayed opening of the Dungeness crab fishery may concentrate effort at a time that could increase conflict with other active fisheries, for instance the salmon fishery. CDFW advises that fishers in all participating fisheries work together and adjust their fishing practices to avoid or minimize these conflicts.