

TITLE 14. Fish and Game Commission Notice of Proposed Changes in Regulations

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Fish and Game Commission (Commission), pursuant to the authority vested by sections 200, 205, 260, 265, 399, 5520, 5521, and 7149.8 of the Fish and Game Code and to implement, interpret or make specific sections 200, 205, 265, 275, 5520, 5521, 7145 and 7149.8 of said Code, proposes to amend Section 29.15, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, relating to recreational take of red abalone.

Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Red abalone is a resource currently managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) under the Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP). The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) is the decision-making body that regulates the recreational take of abalone (sections 200 and 205, Fish and Game Code).

In September 2017, the Department identified wide-sweeping changes in density, occurrence, depth distribution, size and health of red abalone as well as the kelp upon which it depends for food. In addition, the Department found that the average density of red abalone populations has declined below the ARMP fishery closure trigger (0.30 abalone/m²), indicating that the stock could no longer support a fishery. In December 2017, the Commission adopted regulations to close the abalone fishery consistent with the ARMP and Department findings. The Commission also adopted a sunset provision for the closure; the fishery would re-open on April 1, 2019, or upon adoption of a Red Abalone Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and the guidance it provides for fishery reopening, whichever comes first. The regulations closing the recreational abalone fishery became effective on March 29, 2018.

Current recreational abalone fishing regulations in Section 29.15, Title 14, California Code of Regulations (CCR) specify: open areas, season, hours, daily limits, special gear provisions, measuring devices, abalone report card requirements, and minimum size limit. Subsection 29.15(i) closes all ocean waters to the take of abalone beginning on April 1, 2018. This regulation is only in effect until April 1, 2019; if the regulations are not amended to delete or extend that date (subsection 29.15(j)), the fishery will re-open on April 1, 2019, which will allow for the recreational take of abalone in open fishing areas during the open season (subsections 29.15(a), (b), and (c)).

Since the closure of the recreational fishery, the Department has found no meaningful changes in the abalone resource conditions. The limited data the Department has from public reports of dead or dying abalone washing ashore during this past winter and spring corroborates the findings of no meaningful positive changes. Department concludes that re-opening the fishery at this time would be inconsistent with the ARMP and detrimental to the recovery of the fishery. The Commission is proposing to amend subsection 29.15(j) to extend the closure of the abalone fishery for another two years, until April 1, 2021. Effective dates for take and possession contained in subsections 29.15 (a), (b) and (c) of the abalone fishing regulations would be updated as well to reflect the proposed change. The action is necessary to facilitate recovery of the red abalone population while the preparation of the Red Abalone FMP is currently underway.

Benefits of the Regulations

The proposed extension of the red abalone fishery closure will benefit the valuable red abalone resource by protecting it from fishing mortality during the current poor environmental conditions. Further conserving the red abalone resource now will allow it the opportunity to rebuild and be sustainable for the future.

Consistency and Compatibility with Existing Regulations

The Legislature has delegated authority to the Commission to promulgate recreational fishing regulations (Fish and Game Code, sections 200, 205, and 265); no other state agency has the authority to promulgate such regulations. The Commission has conducted a search of Title 14, CCR and determined that the proposed regulation is neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing State regulations and that the proposed regulations are consistent with other recreational fishing regulations and marine protected area regulations in Title 14, CCR.

NOTICE IS GIVEN that any person interested may present statements, orally or in writing, relevant to this action at a hearing to be held at the Radisson Fresno Conference Center, 1055 Van Ness Avenue, Fresno, California, on Wednesday, October 17, 2018, at 8:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard.

NOTICE IS ALSO GIVEN that any person interested may present statements, orally or in writing, relevant to this action at a hearing to be held at the QLN Conference Center, 1938 Avenida del Oro, Oceanside, California, on Wednesday, December 12, 2018, at 8:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard. It is requested, but not required, that written comments be submitted on or before 5:00 p.m. on November 29, 2018, at the address given below, or by email to FGC@fgc.ca.gov. Written comments mailed (to Fish and Game Commission, PO Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94244-2090), or emailed to the Commission office, must be received before 12:00 noon on December 7, 2018. All comments must be received no later than December 12, 2018, at the hearing in Oceanside, California. If you would like copies of any modifications to this proposal, please include your name and mailing address.

Availability of Documents

Copies of the Notice of Proposed Action, the Initial Statement of Reasons, and the text of the regulation in underline and strikeout format can be accessed through the Commission's website at www.fgc.ca.gov. The regulations as well as all related documents upon which the proposal is based (rulemaking file), are on file and available for public review from the agency representative, Valerie Termini, Executive Director, Fish and Game Commission, 1416 Ninth Street, Box 944209, Sacramento, California 94244-2090, phone (916) 653-4899. Please direct requests for the above mentioned documents and inquiries concerning the regulatory process to Valerie Termini or Sheri Tiemann at the preceding address or phone number. **Tom Mason, Sr. Environmental Scientist, Department of Fish and Wildlife, has been designated to respond to questions on the substance of the proposed regulations. Mr. Mason can be reached at (562) 342-7107 or by email at Tom.Mason@wildlife.ca.gov.**

Availability of Modified Text

If the regulations adopted by the Commission differ from but are sufficiently related to the action proposed, they will be available to the public for at least 15 days prior to the date of adoption. Circumstances beyond the control of the Commission (e.g., timing of Federal regulation adoption, timing of resource data collection, timelines do not allow, etc.) or changes made to be responsive to public recommendation and comments during the regulatory process may preclude full compliance with the 15-day comment period, and the Commission will exercise its powers under Section 265 of

the Fish and Game Code. Regulations adopted pursuant to this section are not subject to the time periods for adoption, amendment or repeal of regulations prescribed in Sections 11343.4, 11346.4, 11346.8 and 11347.1 of the Government Code. Any person interested may obtain a copy of said regulations prior to the date of adoption by contacting the agency representative named herein.

If the regulatory proposal is adopted, the final statement of reasons may be obtained from the address above when it has been received from the agency program staff.

Impact of Regulatory Action/Results of the Economic Impact Assessment

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

- (a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Business, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States:

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states because the regulatory action is not likely to significantly increase compliance costs, may or may not significantly impact fishery activity, and only applies to a fishery that is unique to the state of California.

- (b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment:

The Commission does not anticipate any impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs, the creation of new business, the elimination of existing businesses or the expansion of businesses in California.

The Commission anticipates generalized benefits to the health and welfare of California residents through the sustainable management of the red abalone fishery.

The Commission does not anticipate any benefits to worker safety.

The Commission anticipates benefits to the States environment. The proposed action is designed to ensure the sustainability and quality of the fishery, promoting participation, fishing activity, and economic activity.

- (c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

The agency is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

No new costs or savings to State agencies. However, the proposed abalone fishery closure would result in the continued reduction in abalone report card sales with revenue deficits to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife of about \$533,375 for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 fiscal years based on the typical sales of 25,100 at \$21.25 per card. Federal funding to the state would not be impacted by this proposed change in recreational abalone fishing regulations.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None.

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None.

(g) Costs Imposed on any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None.

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None.

Effect on Small Business

It has been determined that the adoption of these regulations may affect small business. The Commission has drafted the regulations in Plain English pursuant to Government Code Sections 11342.580 and 11346.2(a)(1).

Consideration of Alternatives

The Commission must determine that no reasonable alternative considered by the Commission, or that has otherwise been identified and brought to the attention of the Commission, would be more effective in carrying out the purpose for which the action is proposed, would be as effective and less burdensome to affected private persons than the proposed action, or would be more cost effective to affected private persons and equally effective in implementing the statutory policy or other provision of law.

FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

Valerie Termini
Executive Director

Dated: September 21, 2018