

Staff Summary for February 12-13, 2025

27B. Department Marine Region**Today's Item**Information Action

Receive and discuss updates on items of note since the previous Commission meeting, including actions taken by the Department director to lift temporary trap restrictions in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)**Background**

The Department's Marine Region is expected to provide verbal updates, including actions taken by the Department director to lift temporary trap restrictions in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery from the Sonoma/ Mendocino county line to Lopez Point, Monterey County (fishing zones 3 and 4).

Regulations in subsection 29.80(c) specify rules for the use of crab traps, including provisions that became effective in November 2021 allowing the director of the Department, after consulting with the Commission president or the president's designee, to prohibit the deployment and use of crab traps in order to protect humpback whales, blue whales and/or Pacific leatherback sea turtles when concentrations of these species meet specific numerical triggers.

Whenever the director implements a management action pursuant to subsection 29.80(c), they shall notify the Commission and request that the Commission schedule a public discussion of the management action at its next regularly-scheduled meeting. Today is the opportunity to discuss recent actions taken in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery to lift the temporary restrictions on the use of crab traps from the Sonoma/Mendocino county line to Lopez Point, Monterey County.

A Department Marine Region news release, which includes actions for both recreational and commercial Dungeness crab fisheries, is provided as Exhibit 1.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

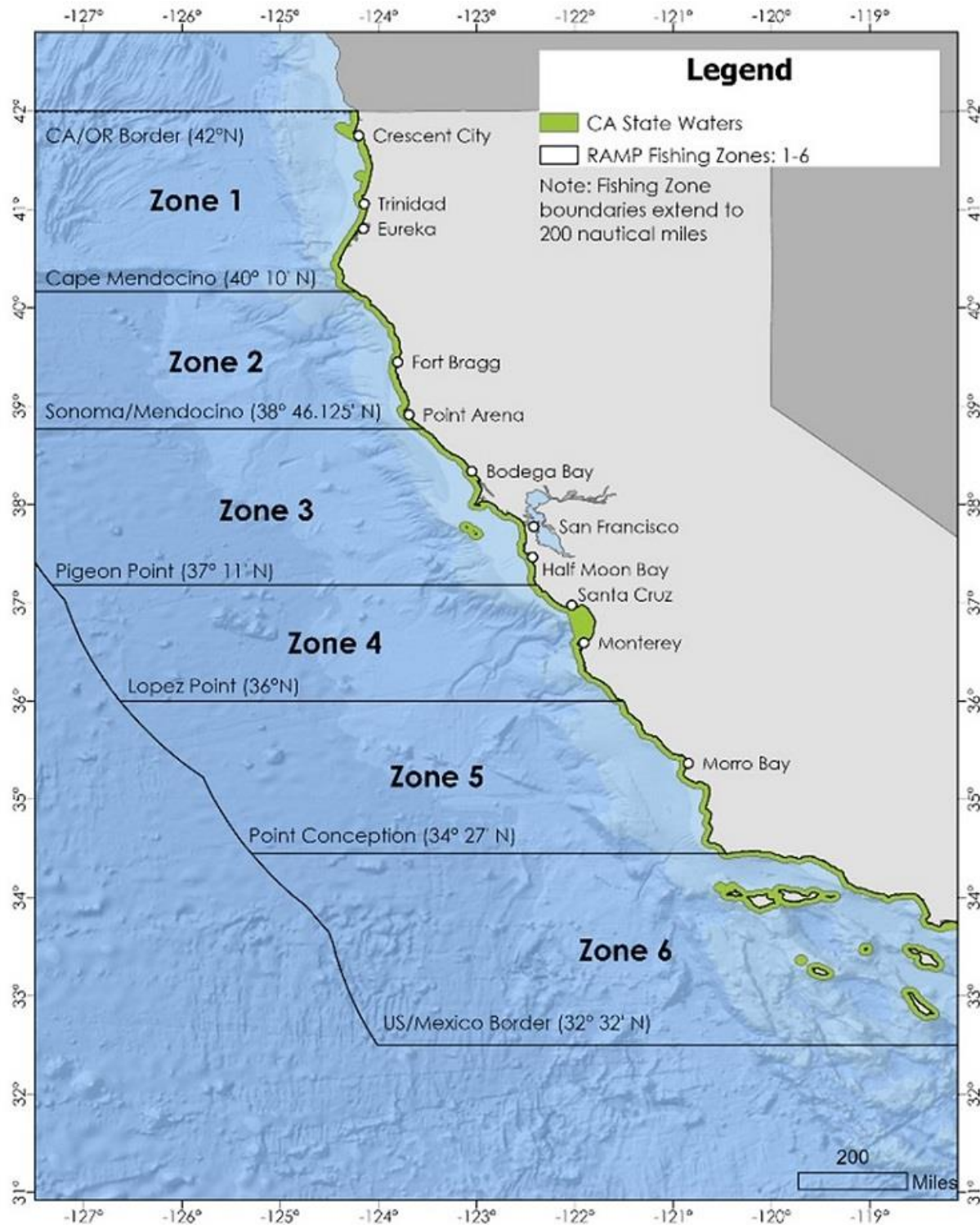
1. [Department news release: Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery to Open Jan. 5 in Central California, dated December 20, 2024](#)

Motion (N/A)

Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery to Open Jan. 5 in Central California

December 20, 2024

[CDFW News](#)



Northern Fishery to Remain Closed until Jan. 15 Due to Inability to Complete Industry-Sponsored Crab Quality Testing

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will open the commercial Dungeness crab fishery from the Sonoma/Mendocino county line to the U.S./Mexico border beginning Jan. 5, 2025, at 12:01 a.m. with pre-soak to begin on Jan. 2, 2025, at 8:01 a.m. This area (Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6) will be subject to a 50 percent trap reduction. The trap reduction is expected to reduce entanglement risk for humpback whales by decreasing the amount of gear and vertical lines in the water.

The Dungeness crab season in the Northern Management Area (Zones 1 and 2, California Oregon Border to the Sonoma/Mendocino county line) will be further delayed pursuant to [Fish and Game Code Section 8276.2 \(PDF\)\(opens in new tab\)](#) due to the inability to conduct industry-sponsored meat quality testing. The season will automatically open on Jan. 15, 2025, at 12:01 a.m. under a 25 percent trap reduction in both Fishing Zones. A pre-soak period will begin on Jan. 12, 2025, at 8:01 a.m. The crab quality delay triggers the fair start provision under Fish and Game Code 8279.1. Under fair start a vessel is prohibited from taking, possessing onboard, or landing crab in an area previously delayed for a period of 30 days from the date of the opening if that vessel previously participated in other commercial Dungeness crab fishing areas (including those in Oregon and Washington) during the same season.

While Dungeness crab has historically been available in time for the holidays, the presence of whales in the fishing areas and entanglements in fishing gear have delayed the season opening in the last several years. Last season, the northern fishing zones opened on Jan. 5, while the central zones were delayed until Jan. 18. Despite the shortened seasons, the California Dungeness crab fishery remains one of the State's most lucrative, averaging close to \$45 million per year over the last five years, consistent with historical averages.

“Making the decision on when to open the Dungeness crab fishery is never an easy one. It requires careful consideration of the need to protect endangered species while sustaining the livelihood of California's fishing communities,” said CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham. “My action today strikes a balance between the needs of the fishery and the needs of California's marine species. Reducing the number of traps in the water is a successful management measure we have utilized before. Applying this protective and precautionary measure to the Northern Management Area allows the fishery to open as early as possible and will minimize the risk of entanglements statewide.”

Managing the fishery to also protect whales and sea turtles has become a collaborative effort between commercial and recreational fishermen, environmental groups, scientists, and agency partners. This year's fishery opener builds off over five years of efforts that

entailed close to 150 meetings of the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group, more than 50 risk assessments, and aerial surveys covering more than 20,000 miles of California's coast. The state has invested over \$6 million to address entanglement risk through CDFW and the California Ocean Protection Council. These funds enabled the purchase and outfitting of electronic monitoring units for the fleet, line to support gear marking programs, the development and application of new tools to evaluate risk, and the expansion of alternative gear testing.

Lisa Damrosch, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, said, "It is always a good thing when California's commercial fishing fleet can get to work, delivering healthy, sustainable seafood to our communities. Delays are difficult, and fisheries management is becoming increasingly complex. Commercial fishing representatives remain committed to being productive partners in finding workable, long-term solutions, and we very much appreciate CDFW's hard work and commitment to collaborating with the industry to set an opening date that balances harvest opportunities with the need to reduce risks to marine mammals."

Any commercial Dungeness crab vessel fishing in or transiting Fishing Zones, regardless of fishing location, is subject to the 25 or 50 percent reduction based on the area transited. Additionally, vessels must have at least 25 or 50 percent of valid buoy tags for the current fishing season onboard and available for inspection by CDFW at all times. Commercial Dungeness crab vessels operating in all Fishing Zones must understand and comply with the restrictions detailed in the [Director's Declaration \(PDF\)\(opens in new tab\)](#), which includes additional information about this gear reduction.

CDFW is also lifting the temporary recreational crab trap restriction, beginning Jan. 2, 2025, at 8:01 a.m., from the Sonoma/Mendocino county line to Lopez Point, Monterey County (Fishing Zones 3 and 4).

A Fleet Advisory remains in effect for both the commercial and recreational fishery for all Fishing Zones.

CDFW encourages both the commercial and recreational crab fisheries to implement best fishing practices, as described in the [Best Practices Guide \(PDF\)\(opens in new tab\)](#) and avoid setting any fishing gear in areas where whales or sea turtles are present. **In addition, the commercial fishery is encouraged to remain vigilant for lost or abandoned gear throughout the fishing season.** Permitted commercial Dungeness crab vessels are allowed to retrieve up to six derelict commercial Dungeness crab traps per fishing trip **pursuant to Section 132.2, Title 14, California Code of Regulations.** Derelict fishing gear may also be reported through [CaITIP](#).

CDFW anticipates the next risk assessment will take place in mid-January 2025. For more information related to the risk assessment process, please visit [CDFW's Whale Safe Fisheries page](#). For more information on the Dungeness crab fishery, please visit www.wildlife.ca.gov/crab. Please see this [Frequently Asked Questions \(PDF\)\(opens in new tab\)](#) for more information about the commercial fishery.

###

Media Contacts:

[Ryan Bartling](#), CDFW Marine Region, (415) 238-2638

[Katie Talbot](#), CDFW Communications, 916-204-1381