

Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025

18B. Department Marine Region**Today's Item****Information** ☒**Action** ☐

Receive updates on items of note since the previous Commission meeting, including:

- I. Update on the delay in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery opening and trap limitations

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 related to recreational and commercial Dungeness crab fisheries under authority of California Fish and Game Code Section 5523 and subsection 29.80(c) of Title 14, California Code of Regulations (Exhibit 1).

Pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 5523, "If the Director of the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), in consultation with the State Public Health Officer, determines, based on thorough and adequate scientific evidence, that any species or subspecies of fish is likely to pose a human health risk from high levels of toxic substances, the Director of Fish and Wildlife may order the closure of any waters or otherwise restrict the taking in state waters of that species." The director of the Department must then notify the Commission of a delay and request the Commission schedule a public discussion at its next scheduled meeting. The Department will report on actions taken in response to OEHHA's determination (Exhibit 2).

Regulations in subsection 29.80(c) specify rules for the use of recreational 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 recreational crab traps 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), he or she shall notify the Commission and request that the Commission schedule a public discussion of the management action at its next regularly-scheduled Commission meeting.

Today is the opportunity to discuss recent actions taken in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery to: (1) delay the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab fishery north of the Sonoma/Mendocino counties line due to a public health hazard from domoic acid, and (2) temporarily prohibit the use of recreational crab traps in zones 3 and 4 based on the presence of humpback whales and risk of entanglement.

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

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Exhibits

1. Department news release: [“Recreational Dungeness Crab Fishing Begins Nov. 1 with Limitations, Commercial Season Delayed,”](#) dated October 24, 2025
2. [Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment memo,](#) dated October 23, 2025

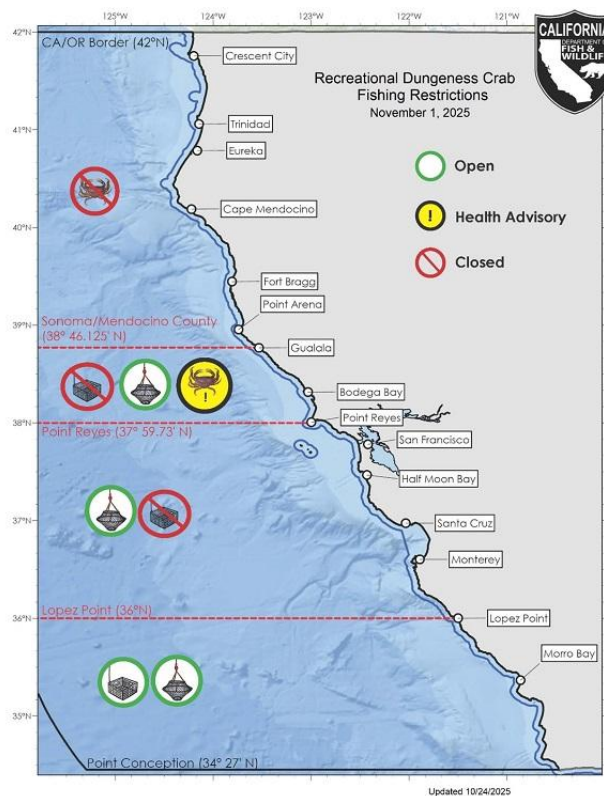
Motion (N/A)



CDFW NEWS

October 24, 2025

Recreational Dungeness Crab Fishing Begins Nov. 1 with Limitations, Commercial Season Delayed



The recreational Dungeness crab season will open beginning November 1, 2025, except in northern California where it has been delayed due to a public health hazard.

State health agencies determined that Dungeness crab in northern California have unhealthy levels of domoic acid and recommended delaying the opening of the recreational fishery in state waters from the California/Oregon border (42° 0.00' N latitude) south to the Sonoma/Mendocino County line (38° 46.125' N latitude). Following this [recommendation](#), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director Charlton H. Bonham has [delayed the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab fishery](#) in northern California. Recreational take and/or possession of Dungeness crab is prohibited in these closed waters.

In the area between the Sonoma/Mendocino County line and Point Reyes (37° 59.73' N latitude), state health agencies are advising the public not to consume crab viscera (guts) to avoid potential domoic acid exposure. In addition, the use of crab traps will be temporarily restricted between the Sonoma/Mendocino County line and Lopez Point, Monterey County (36° N latitude, Fishing Zones 3 and 4) when the season opens due to the presence of humpback whales and potential for entanglement from recreational crab traps. A Fleet Advisory has also been issued for all Fishing Zones for the recreational fishery and crabbers should avoid setting any gear in areas where whales are present. Also, all hoop nets must be serviced every two hours and cannot be left unattended for longer periods.

Recreational take of Dungeness crab by other methods, including hoop nets and crab snares, is not affected by the temporary trap restriction in these areas. Crab traps cannot be used south of Point Arguello.

The commercial Dungeness crab fishery will be [delayed in all Fishing Zones](#) due to numerous reported entanglements this year, high abundance of [humpback whales, and presence of leatherback sea turtles](#). This delay will allow whales and sea turtles to migrate out of California waters prior to the opening of the commercial fishery. This delay was broadly supported by the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Association (PCFFA).

"Another year of a delayed commercial Dungeness crab season is incredibly difficult for our fleet and port communities. However, given the current risk assessment process, the commercial fleet supported this outcome as the most practical path forward," said Lisa Damrosch, PCFFA Executive Director. "We appreciate CDFW and Director Bonham listening to input from the Dungeness Crab Gear Working Group and providing the needed clarity for planning. Although none of this is easy, we thank CDFW for their responsiveness, which reflects the cooperation that will be essential to meeting the challenges ahead for this fishery and our fleet."

"CDFW remains steadfast in our commitment to working collaboratively with all sectors to protect whale and turtles from entanglements in fishing gear," said CDFW Director Bonham. "Partnerships and collaborations are more important than ever as we work together to protect

endangered whales and turtles and our fishing communities in the face of increasing disruptions from our changing climate.”

CDFW anticipates the next risk assessment will take place in mid-December to inform a possible opening of the commercial fishery around the New Year. During the mid-December Risk Assessment, the CDFW Director will evaluate all available data, including a recommendation from the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group to determine whether the commercial fishery can open and recreational trap restrictions can be lifted.

The delay of the northern recreational fishery shall remain in effect until the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, in consultation with the State Public Health Officer of California Department of Public Health (CDPH), determines that domoic acid no longer poses a significant risk to public health. Domoic acid is a potent neurotoxin produced by *Pseudo-nitzschia*, a naturally occurring single-celled, marine alga under certain ocean conditions. Domoic acid can accumulate in shellfish, other invertebrates and sometimes fish without the organism becoming ill themselves. At low levels, domoic acid exposure can cause nausea, diarrhea and dizziness in humans. At higher levels, it can cause persistent short-term memory loss, seizures and can in some cases be fatal.

For the latest information on domoic acid, health advisories and season closures please see the following:

CDFW:

- [Fishery closure information and health advisories](#) website
- **Domoic Acid Fishery Closure Information Line:** (831) 649-2883

CDPH:

- [Domoic Acid](#) results website (subsection Analytical Data – Crabs)
- [Shellfish advisories page](#) for latest consumption warnings
- **Biotoxin information Line:** (510) 412-4643 or (800) 553-4133

For more information related to the risk assessment process, please visit CDFW's [Whale Safe Fisheries page](#) or more information on the Dungeness crab fishery, please visit www.wildlife.ca.gov/crab.

Media Contacts:

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Gavin Newsom, Governor
Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection
Kristina Thayer, Ph.D., Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

FROM: Kristina Thayer, Ph.D. 
Director Kris Thayer (Oct 23, 2025 15:17:46 PDT)

DATE: October 23, 2025

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION TO DELAY THE OPENING OF THE
RECREATIONAL DUNGENESS CRAB FISHERY IN BIOTOXIN
MANAGEMENT AREAS A, B, C, AND D, FROM THE
SONOMA/MENDOCINO COUNTY LINE TO THE CALIFORNIA/OREGON
BORDER (MULTIPLE COUNTIES)

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), in consultation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), has determined that consumption of Dungeness crab from Biotoxin Management Areas (BMAs) A, B, and D in Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino counties, respectively, poses a significant threat for domoic acid exposure. OEHHA, in consultation with CDPH, therefore recommends that the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab fishery be delayed in state waters from the Sonoma/Mendocino County Line (38° 46.125' N. latitude) north to the California/Oregon border (42° N. latitude) (i.e., BMA's A – D), based on elevated levels of domoic acid in the viscera and meat of Dungeness crab collected from this region and analyzed by state laboratories.

This recommendation also includes state waters in BMA C, an area for which there are no currently available crab data, because it is located between BMAs B and D where recent crab samples contained domoic acid levels that exceed federal action levels. A table presenting the results of domoic acid analysis in crab samples collected from the Northern California coastal region is shown below.

OEHHA strongly recommends that non-commercial shellfish harvesters continue to follow all [CDPH marine biotoxin quarantines and health advisories](#), including those for Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxins. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, CDPH, and OEHHA will continue to collect, monitor, and analyze Dungeness crab to determine when the recreational Dungeness crab fishery in BMAs A through D (Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino counties) can be re-opened safely. If you have questions, please contact me at Kris.Thayer@oehha.ca.gov or Dr. Wesley Smith at Wesley.Smith@oehha.ca.gov. Kristina Thayer

Most Recent Dungeness Crab Sampling Results

BIOTOXIN MANGEMENT AREA (BMA)	PORT	COLLECTION SITE	SAMPLE COLLECTION DATE	NUMBER OF SAMPLES	TISSUE TYPE	SAMPLE RESULTS: RANGE DOMOIC ACID (ppm)	AVERAGE LEVEL DOMOIC ACID (ppm)	% OF SAMPLES EXCEEDING ACTION LEVEL*
BMA A	Crescent City	George Reef	9/25/25	6	viscera	7.7 – 100	45	67%
				4	meat	7.7 – 30	16	25%
		Klamath River	9/25/25	6	viscera	3.1 – 31	22	17%
				1	meat	11	nan	0%
BMA B	Trinidad	Trinidad Lagoons	9/24/25	6	viscera	9.7 – 130	35	17%
				1	meat	95	na	100%
		Trinidad Head	9/24/25	6	viscera	10 – 180	58	50%
				3	meat	17 – 79	43	67%
BMA D	Fort Bragg	Manchester Beach	10/15/25	6	viscera	<2.5 – 110	33**	33%

*The action level for viscera >30 ppm and for meat is ≥20 ppm.

**Non-detect (<2.5 ppm) included as zero in the calculation of the average.

na = not applicable

cc: June Weintraub, Sc.D.
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Charlton H. Bonham, Director
October 23, 2025
Page 3

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