DSBG STATE EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Deep-Set Buoy Gear (DSBG) State Exempted Fishing Permit

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PROJECT REPORT

Report Term: Final Report

Project Period: September 1, 2022 – August 31, 2026

Most Recent Reporting Period: September 1, 2025 – August 31, 2026

Submission Date: November 16, 2026

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of Deep-Set Buoy Gear (DSBG) fishing in California state waters, within three nautical miles of shore, under a State Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP).

The project was intended to explore the potential for DSBG fishing in state waters, evaluate fishing opportunities in areas surrounding the Channel Islands and along the mainland coast, and demonstrate that the gear could be operated responsibly while maintaining proper gear management and minimizing bycatch.

The underwater structure and oceanographic conditions surrounding the Channel Islands and mainland coastline provide potentially productive habitat for swordfish. This project provided an opportunity to explore these areas and evaluate whether state waters could become an important additional fishing area for the DSBG fishery.

The project also provided an opportunity for multiple vessels to participate in state-water DSBG operations and demonstrate the practicality of fishing this gear in areas that have not been extensively explored through this fishery.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES COMPLETED

Throughout the project period, participating vessels conducted Deep-Set Buoy Gear fishing operations under the State EFP in California waters within three nautical miles of shore.

During the most recent reporting period, September 1, 2025, through August 31, 2026, we completed a handful of sets using standard buoy gear, with only one hook deployed per buoy.

Overall, fishing effort was lower than in previous years, primarily due to a low number of hookups and limited fishing opportunities. We also did not participate in NSBG fishing during this reporting period.

Although fishing effort was limited during the most recent reporting period, the project successfully demonstrated that DSBG can be deployed and operated in California state waters.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Overall, the State EFP program was a success and demonstrated that Deep-Set Buoy Gear has significant potential in California state waters.

One of the most important findings was that all four participating vessels were able to fish in state waters without losing gear while maintaining proper gear management practices. This demonstrates that DSBG can be effectively operated in these areas without compromising responsible fishing practices.

The project also demonstrated the potential for productive fishing opportunities surrounding the Channel Islands and along the mainland coast. The underwater structure in these areas provides promising habitat that warrants additional exploration and fishing effort.

Although the number of sets completed during the most recent reporting period was limited, the overall experience gained through the EFP supports the continued development and expansion of this fishery.

Based on the results of this project, I believe DSBG fishing in state waters could eventually become one of the most productive areas of the fishery.

Recommendations for Future Fisheries Management

Based on the experience and results of this EFP, I recommend the following steps to expand DSBG fishing opportunities in California state waters:

1. Establish a Five-Year Trial Period for Tier 1 Permit Holders

Allow qualified Tier 1 DSBG permit holders to fish within California state waters, within three nautical miles of shore, for an initial five-year trial period without requiring an individual Exempted Fishing Permit.

This would allow additional qualified vessels to participate, increase fishing effort, and generate a larger amount of data to better evaluate the productivity and potential of the fishery.

2. Maintain Existing Gear Requirements and Management Practices

Participating vessels should continue following established DSBG gear configurations, deployment procedures, marking requirements, and responsible gear management practices.

Maintaining these standards would help ensure that expanded access does not compromise the responsible fishing practices demonstrated through the current EFP program.

3. Expand Data Collection and Reporting

During the five-year trial period, participating vessels should document and report fishing effort, catch rates, bycatch, gear interactions, fishing locations, and any lost gear.

This information would provide fisheries managers with a more comprehensive understanding of the fishery's productivity, environmental impacts, and operational feasibility.

4. Allow Exploration of Additional Productive State-Water Areas

Participating vessels should have the opportunity to explore additional fishing grounds along the mainland coast and surrounding the Channel Islands.

These areas contain significant underwater structure and potentially productive swordfish habitat that has not yet been fully explored through DSBG fishing. Additional fishing effort would help identify productive grounds and better evaluate the potential of these areas.

5. Conduct a Formal Evaluation Following the Five-Year Trial

At the conclusion of the five-year trial period, the collected information should be reviewed to evaluate overall production, bycatch rates, gear performance, and the success of the program.

Based on these results, management agencies could determine whether state-water access should become a permanent opportunity for Tier 1 permit holders and whether participation should be expanded to additional qualified vessels.

Conclusion

I believe the State EFP program has demonstrated that Deep-Set Buoy Gear can be successfully operated in California state waters while maintaining responsible fishing practices, proper gear management, and low bycatch.

Rather than continuing to limit state-water fishing opportunities to individual EFPs, I believe allowing qualified Tier 1 permit holders to participate in a five-year trial period is a practical and reasonable next step.

This would give the fishery an opportunity to develop, allow more vessels to contribute valuable data, and provide fisheries managers with the information needed to make informed decisions about its future.

California state waters, particularly the areas surrounding the Channel Islands and along the mainland coast, have significant potential for DSBG fishing. I believe this potential deserves the opportunity to be fully explored.

Ultimately, my goal is to see DSBG fishing become a more established and productive opportunity in California state waters. The results of this EFP provide a strong foundation for moving in that direction.

KEY PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER COLLABORATORS

The following four vessels participated in the State EFP project:

F/V Finner

Participated in DSBG fishing operations and project activities.

Helped evaluate the feasibility of DSBG fishing in California state waters.

F/V Goldcoast

Participated in state-water DSBG fishing operations.

Contributed to evaluating gear performance and fishing operations.

F/V Shearwater

Participated in state-water DSBG fishing operations.

Contributed to evaluating gear performance and fishing operations.

F/V Bearflag 2

Participated in state-water DSBG fishing operations.

Contributed to evaluating gear performance and fishing operations.

All four participating vessels contributed to demonstrating the feasibility of operating DSBG in California state waters while maintaining proper gear management