

Meeting Summary
DCTF Executive Committee
July 13, 2023

Meeting Participants

EC Members Present	Bill Blue, Mike Cunningham, Nick Krieger, Dick Ogg, Zach Rotwein, Randy Smith, Troy Wakefield, Geoff Bettencourt
EC Members Absent	None
Other Meeting Participants	Noah Ben-Aderet, Ocean Protection Council Ryan Bartling, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Joanna Grebel, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Christy Juhasz, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Asst. Chief. Eric Kord, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Officer Tiffany Wolvek, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Rachelle Fisher, DCTF Administrative Team Sara Gene, DCTF Administrative Team Scarlett Schroeder, DCTF Administrative Team Support

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome, introductions, agenda overview.

- The California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) Administrative Team (Admin Team) introduced and welcomed participants to the DCTF Executive Committee (EC) call.
- The EC is a subcommittee of the DCTF and cannot make decisions on behalf of the DCTF. The DCTF has directed the EC to begin discussions to address priority topics and help usher DCTF recommendations between DCTF meetings. The [2021-2023 Work Plan](#) and submissions from the public (see [Guidelines to Submit Requests DCTF & Executive Committee Agenda Items](#)) also guide EC discussions. All meeting outcomes, including ideas and options developed by the EC, will be shared with the full DCTF for consideration during the next DCTF meeting, which is anticipated for October 2023.
- Agenda topics, meeting agreements, and [guidelines for providing public comment](#) were reviewed. The Admin Team reminded participants that per the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act, new topics cannot be added to the agenda once posted (a minimum of 10 days before the meeting).
- A call recording will be available upon request for 30 days following the call. Please contact info@dungenesscrabtaskforce.com for more information.

2. Public comments on non-agenda items.

- Tony Anello, a commercial fisherman, would like the DCTF to discuss the use of hoop nets in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery. He stated that they could be used to allow additional fishing opportunities to the commercial fleet in the fall when whale entanglement risk is elevated, leading to earlier, traditional season openers and the return of the Thanksgiving and Christmas markets.

3. Updates involving the Dungeness crab fishery, including, but not limited to, 2023 DCTF Election status, line marking, etc.

- **2023 DCTF Election Status:** The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are in the process of carrying out DCTF commercial fishing elections as described in

[Fish and Game Code Section 8276.4](#). Paper ballots were sent in June to registered Eureka, Bodega Bay, Princeton-Half Moon Bay, and non-resident California commercial Dungeness crab permit holders. Ballots must be postmarked or emailed ballots as of Monday, July 17. Permit verification numbers are required to accompany ballots. Election results will be announced in late August or early September. Newly elected DCTF members will be onboarded before the October DCTF meeting. More information is available on the [DCTF's webpage](#), and further updates will be posted and circulated via the DCTF listserv.

- **Experimental Fishing Permits (EFP):** In May 2023, an EFP was granted to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, allowing five vessels to participate on the permit that runs from the Sonoma-Mendocino line to Lopez Point, Monterey County, in the central management zone. The EFP is year-round; however, retaining catch outside the open season is prohibited. CDFW has received requests for pre-application consultation and will be working with folks. If you would like to discuss more about the EFP process, please contact fgc@fgc.ca.gov or Christy Juhasz at christy.juhasz@wildlife.ca.gov, and she will direct you to the proper contacts.
- **Line Marking:** As part of the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP), the California Dungeness crab fishery is penalized for unknown sources of entanglement. Therefore, state and federal agencies are looking into line-marking to reduce the number of unknown entanglements. CDFW is continuing to explore line marking options based on meetings with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and members of the commercial Dungeness crab fishing fleet. Two colors are being explored to identify 1) the state the gear originated; and 2) the fishery the gear is associated with. California is considering using the colors blue, green, or lavender purple to denote that the gear originated from California. CDFW, ODFW, and WDFW have agreed that black will denote the Dungeness crab fishery. Testing is underway to inform potential line marking regulations and the efficacy of line marking in meeting entanglement identification goals. A range of options are still being considered.
 - An EC Member asked how visible the marked lines were during the field tests. CDFW could see the markings on the surface; however, they had yet to review the underwater photos at the time of this meeting. Preliminarily, lavender purple was the most visible color from the surface.
 - An EC Member stated that requiring line marking would require fishermen to replace most of their current lines/ropes, which would be cost-prohibitive and wasteful. Some EC Members said they would like an interim, cost-effective solution (e.g., dyeing rope, tape) for marking lines to reduce unknown sources of marine life entanglement. Additionally, low-cost solutions like paint and tape could be used while the fleet transitions to full compliance. CDFW expressed that they heard the request to mark lines with paint or tape and are testing and discussing this as an option.
 - A discussion ensued about how much of the lines in the fleet needed to be marked before the penalties for unknown entanglements could be removed from RAMP. CDFW said that the conversation around that question is ongoing.
 - An EC Member asked if financial support for purchasing new lines for line marking could be available to address the financial burdens to the fleet. CDFW is in discussions with NMFS and Senator McGuire's office, but funding has not yet been identified. Additionally, CDFW is still seeking clarity from the fleet, gear manufacturers, and NMFS on cost estimates for line marking to inform these discussions.
- **CDFW positions:** CDFW is excited to announce that they are bringing on another staff member, Lindsay Caldwell, formerly Ocean Protection Council staff, to help facilitate the Whale Working Group and RAMP implementation with the support and direction of Ryan Bartling on the Whale Safe Fisheries Team.
- **Gear Innovation Exchange:** CDFW and the Whale Working Group are looking to build upon the August 2022 [Alternative Gear Workshop](#) and have another gathering with fishermen and CDFW to have a hands-on "Knowledge Exchange Workshop" around alternative gear. The workshop would be an opportunity for fishermen and innovators to rig, deploy, and retrieve gear while creating space for collaborative discussion on the use of the gear and the needs of the fishing fleet. They are still in the development stage of planning the workshop and anticipate offering two locations to participate: 1) one in the Bay Area and 2) one in the Northern management area (e.g., Eureka). The tentative timing is in October. If you want more information about the Gear Innovation Knowledge Exchange, please contact Ryan at

Public Comment

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

5. *Presentation and discussion on the Tri-State Crab Quality testing program including, but not limited to, an overview of current protocol and procedures, lessons learned from past seasons, discuss needs for protocol updates, etc.*

- Christy Juhasz, CDFW, [provided an overview of the Tri-State Crab Quality testing program](#), including current protocol and procedures, lessons learned from past seasons, and highlighted issues that the fleet has flagged in past seasons. The EC discussed concerns with [Tri-State Testing Protocols](#) and general testing procedures coordinated by CDFW.
- *General Testing Procedures*
 - *Selection of the Vessels Performing the Tests:* EC Members discussed issues with the integrity of some of the vessels responsible for collecting test samples. An EC Member suggested port associations help identify vessels for testing. Others expressed support for CDFW continuing to select vessels with good standing as they've done in the past. The group decided port associations would provide CDFW with vessel names, then CDFW would determine which vessels would conduct the quality tests.
 - *Observer Coverage:* EC Members expressed interest in increasing the observer coverage in the program both on vessels and at the processing facilities to ensure a transparent and legitimate process. Multiple EC Members expressed interest in having a warden from the CDFW Law Enforcement Division (LED) present as the observer or the processors.
 - LED explained that they do not have the staff capacity to support quality testing. Additionally, since quality testing is related to markets, not resource management supporting quality testing is not a priority for LED.
 - An EC Member suggested reaching out to Cal Poly Humboldt to see if they would be able to provide low-cost observers. CDFW clarified that all observers must be trained on procedures and sign up as volunteers through CDFW.
 - The Facilitation Team asked the EC how CDFW should prioritize observers if coverage is limited (i.e., is it more of a priority to have observers when setting the traps, pulling the traps, and/or at the processing facility?). EC Members expressed that observers should be present at all three stages of testing, but if they had to choose, they would recommend one on the boat when pulling traps and one at the processing plant leaning towards the processing plant as most important. This would prevent any instigations of cherry-picking crabs.
- *Tri-State Testing Protocols*
 - *Retention of Crabs vs Number of Traps:* Members of the commercial fleet have expressed concern about the fact that 1,000 lbs of crab are required for each test area as part of the Tri-State testing protocols. An EC Member suggested revising the protocols to specify the number of traps that should be used as opposed to the poundage of crabs retained. Another EC Member suggested modifying the requirement related to poundage and specifying the number of crabs (e.g., 100 crabs) that must be retained for a test. Another EC Member suggested maintaining the status quo. CDFW clarified that any changes to the sampling protocols would require a discussion with and approval by the [Tri-State Dungeness Crab Committee](#).
 - *Meat Recovery:* The EC discussed the current meat yield/recovery rate needed to open the fishery as outlined in the Tri-State Testing Protocols. CDFW confirmed any intended changes to the meat recovery rate would need approval by the [Tri-State Dungeness Crab Committee](#). An EC Member stated lowering the percentage would not be supported by the Tri-State Dungeness Crab

Committee. Lowering the standard would not allow fishermen opportunities to bargain for higher prices from processors. A couple of EC Members expressed support for recommending an increase in the meat recovery rate to 25%. Another EC member pointed out that if the season is delayed until the meat recovery rate is 25%, there could be issues with marine life entanglements. An EC Member stated that since the Central management area doesn't do quality testing, they do not think marine life entanglements will be an issue if the meat recovery rate is increased.

- *Use of Bait:* An EC Member expressed concern that too much bait was being used by those performing the tests. CDFW clarified that the use of bait is not included in the current testing protocols and would need to be revisited by the Tri-State Dungeness Crab Committee if it was a concern.
- The EC would like the DCTF to continue discussing Tri-State testing procedures and protocols and requested the Admin Team summarize the ideas generated in this discussion into a document that Members can use to support conversations within their ports.

Public Comment

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

6. Receive updates on the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) and continue discussions about addressing whale entanglements and risk. Discussion may include but will not be limited to the Best Fishing Practices for Minimizing Marine Life Entanglement, etc.

During the May 25 Executive Committee meeting, a discussion around the [Best Practices Guide for Minimizing Marine Life Entanglements](#) (Best Practices Guide) was requested as there was interest in recommending it put into regulation. The Best Practices Guide recommends using the least amount of surface gear with the shortest possible line. EC Members explained that excess and slack lines are continuing to be a problem in the fleet, especially in the Central Management Area.

- EC Members discussed slack lines in the water column and expressed interest in regulations that would prohibit slack lines under the surface. EC Members highlighted that most line slack would be underwater rather than floating on the surface based on the type of line used (i.e., neutral buoyancy)
- An EC Member acknowledged that LED previously indicated that they could not enforce submerged slack lines but pushed back on the notion because they said LED would need to use the same tools to enforce line marking in the future.
 - LED stated slacklines on the surface are easier to enforce than submerged lines. Additionally, any regulation related to subsurface slack lines would need to clearly specify the definition of slack line (e.g., the length of the line submerged related to the depth of the trap). LED is open to further discussion on this topic and cautioned the EC that being overly restrictive could be more impactful than intended. Multiple EC Members agreed that identifying a depth-to-line ratio would be challenging.
- Some EC members recommend caution and opposed recommending mandatory depth-to-line ratio regulations at this time. They are concerned that when line marking goes into effect, folks will add additional lines without removing others to meet the line marking requirements resulting in more slack lines. However, they expressed concern that such regulations could have unintended consequences for folks fishing responsibly with tight gear setups. They suggested further discussion with the fleet before the DCTF addresses this topic. One EC Member stated derelict gear could become more prevalent if the gear is too tight. Another EC Member acknowledged most folks follow the law and think it would be beneficial to codify it.
- The EC discussed the buoy set-up recommended in the Best Practices Guide and generally agreed that fishermen should fish with as few buoys as possible. They are aware that deep-water fishermen need to have multiple buoys. However, they suggested reducing the number of allowable buoys from three (one main and two trailer buoys) to two (one main and one trailer buoy) when fishing in waters less than 40 fathoms.
- The Admin Team suggested that, as an alternative to updating regulations, the ideas explored during this

meeting could be incorporated into the Best Practices Guide or be used as a tool in the RAMP toolbox when the risk of entanglement is elevated. The EC requested this topic be added to the DCTF's October meeting agenda for further exploration and discussion.

Public Comment

- No public comment was received on this agenda item..

7. *Confirm priority topics for 2023 DCTF and Executive Committee meetings.*

- The next DCTF Meeting is anticipated for October 2023.
- The EC reviewed the list of topics that have been identified by the EC and the public that have been requested to be added to future EC and DCTF agendas:
 - Updating Tri-State testing protocol
 - Codifying the Whales Best Practices Guide
 - Reintroduction of sea otters
 - Transiting closed areas with crab onboard
 - Line Marking -impacts
 - Vessel lengths on permits
 - Remove vessel length restrictions from permits
 - Vessel length survey when transferring
 - Buyback program
 - Hoop Nets
 - EFPs (no-gos)
 - Long-lining/Stringing gear
 - Gear reduction
 - Sort box
 - Tending gear changes, pulling gear in at night
 - On/off fishing days
- EC Members did not believe any of these topics were particularly high priority and did not need discussion prior to the October DCTF meeting. As a result, the EC requested that the August/September EC meeting be canceled. The EC identified the following preliminary topics to be added to the October DCTF meeting: DCTF charter confirmation for new members, RAMP-related topics (i.e., line marking, EFPs, Whales Best Practices Guide), Tri-State quality testing, and the potential reintroduction of sea otters. Other topics may also be added to the agenda at the discretion of the EC and Admin Team.

Public Comment

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

8. *Adjourn*

- The Admin Team summarized the next steps that emerged from the call discussion.
- **The Admin Team will:**
 - **Produce a summary of this conference call and post it on the DCTF webpage once it has been reviewed for accuracy by the EC.**
 - **Consider the process for developing an agenda supported by the EC in the absence of a late August DCTF Executive Committee meeting.**
 - **Compile and share options for the Whale's Best Practices Guide that can be used by DCTF**

members to inform discussions with their constituents.

- **CDFW will:**
 - **Continue to be responsive to questions about DCTF elections, RAMP, EFP ideas and questions, etc.**

A DCTF meeting is anticipated for late October or early November 2023. A future EC meeting is anticipated in Spring 2024. More details will be shared on the [DCTF webpage](#) and through the [DCTF email list](#).