



Dungeness Crab Task Force Background and Operations

December 2023

This document was developed to supplement the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) reports to the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and California Fish and Game Commission (Commission).

Additional information, including DCTF history, previous reports, and meeting summaries with details on the development of the recommendations provided in this report, is available on the DCTF webpage: <http://www.opc.ca.gov/2009/04/dungeness-crab-task-force/>.

BACKGROUND

The commercial Dungeness crab fishery is one of the most valuable and productive fisheries in California^{1, 2, 3} with an average ex-vessel value⁴ of approximately \$20.8 - \$62.8 million per year.⁵ This is largely due to strong demand for the product by consumers, including international markets. The California Dungeness crab industry has faced unprecedented events over the last few years (e.g. elevated levels of domoic acid, whale entanglements resulting in litigation against CDFW, COVID-19 impacting markets) that have created significant management and economic challenges. Industry members remain committed to being involved in management decision-making that safeguards the industry's economic viability, minimizes ecological impacts, and preserves the California fishing communities that rely on the resource.

The fishery consists of a diverse group of individuals, communities, viewpoints, and opinions regarding the management goals. Objectives for the California Dungeness crab fishery generally vary by production level, vessel size, and homeport location.^{6, 7, 8} This makes it challenging at times for fishery participants to reach agreements. Nonetheless, the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) continues to reach agreements and forward recommendations to fisheries managers

¹ Hackett, Steven, D. King, D. Hansen and E. Price. 2009. *The Economic Structure of California's Commercial Fisheries*. Technical Report . California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento.

<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/economicstructure.asp>

² The Dungeness crab fishery is an important contributor to the economy of several port communities such as Crescent City (Pomeroy, C., et al. 2010. Pomeroy, C., et al. (2011). *California's North Coast Fishing Communities: Historical Perspective and Recent Trends*. California Sea Grant Technical Report T-072., La Jolla, CA: 350p.

<http://www.csgc.ucsd.edu/EXTENSION/ADVISORS/Pomeroy.html>)

³ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2023. [Dungeness Crab, *Metacarcinus magister*, Enhanced Status Report](#).

⁴ Ex-vessel value is the amount paid to fishermen when they land (deliver) their catch to buyers at the docks.

⁵ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2023. [Dungeness Crab, *Metacarcinus magister*, Enhanced Status Report](#).

⁶ Dewees, C.M. et al. 2004. Racing for crabs: Cost and management options evaluated in Dungeness crab fishery. *California Agriculture*. Vol. 58(4): 186-193.

⁷ Pomeroy, C., et al. 2010. *California's North Coast Fishing Communities: Historical Perspective and Recent Trends*. California Sea Grant Technical Report T-072. La Jolla, CA: 350p. <http://www-csgc.ucsd.edu/EXTENSION/ADVISORS/Pomeroy.html>.

⁸ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2023. [Dungeness Crab, *Metacarcinus magister*, Enhanced Status Report](#).

and those with decision-making authority. The DCTF looks forward to continuing this work and informing the Legislature, CDFW, and the Commission on the outcomes of their discussions regarding the industry's priority issues.

Management of the California Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery

The California Dungeness crab commercial fishery is managed by CDFW pursuant to California Fish and Game Code §8275 *et seq*, which requires the fishery to use a 3-S management strategy (sex, size, and season). Commercial harvest is restricted to male crabs, greater than 6.25 inches carapace (body) width. The traditional commercial fishing season runs from November 15 through June 30 in the Central Management Area,⁹ and December 1 through July 15 in the Northern Management Area.¹⁰ The California Fish and Game Code allows for season opening delays and early closures due to public health issues (e.g., domoic acid) and marine life entanglement risk assessments; the Northern Management area could be delayed due to low meat yield.¹¹ In 2019-20, there were 552 permits, of which 437 were active and 115 were inactive (or “latent” referring to those permits (vessels) with landings of less than 200lbs in the 9 previous seasons).¹²

In contrast to the commercial fishery, the Dungeness crab recreational fishery is managed by the Commission, with measures such as a specified season, daily bag limits, and minimum size requirements. The specifics of the season vary by region and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFVs) are the only sport fishing mode that has trap limits.

DCTF PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

The DCTF's operating and voting procedures are described in Fish and Game Code §8276.4 and the DCTF Charter ([Appendix 2](#)). The DCTF is composed of 27 members, 21 voting and 6 non-voting Members. This includes 17 voting members representing commercial fishing interests, two members (one voting and one non-voting) representing sport fishing interests, two voting members representing crab processing interests, one voting member representing commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) interests, two non-voting members representing nongovernmental organization interests, one non-voting member representing the University of California Sea Grant, and two non-voting members representing CDFW.

The California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) and CDFW completed DCTF commercial fishing elections (as described in Fish and Game Code §8276.4) for all port complexes in summer 2023. Commercial fishermen are elected to the DCTF by their peers to represent their home port complexes and production level. The OPC and CDFW will conduct DCTF elections every three years in each port, on a staggered basis. As mandated in Fish and Game Code §8276.4, the Chair of the OPC will appoint members for the seven non-commercial fishing seats following a public

⁹ The Central Management Area refers to all coastal districts south of the Mendocino/Sonoma County Line to the Mexican border

¹⁰ The Northern Management Area refers to districts 6, 7, 8 and 9 and is located from north of the Mendocino/Sonoma County line to the Oregon border.

¹¹ Preseason crab quality testing is used to predict the meat recovery rate prior to the season opener. A recovery rate of 24% is required for the December 1 season opener in the Northern Management Area. If this standard is not met, testing is repeated at specific time intervals until this recovery rate is achieved, with the fishery opening no later than January 15, regardless of test results at that time. Requirements for preseason testing do not apply in the Central Management Area.

¹² Pers. communication C. Juhasz, California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 3 Dec 2020

solicitation for nominations on an as-needed basis. More information about DCTF commercial fishing elections and the appointment process is available on the [DCTF's webpage](#).

The DCTF Charter establishes ground rules, member roles, and voting procedures for the group and was most recently amended in October 2020. In keeping with those procedures and in response to the Legislature's request for management recommendations, the DCTF Charter states that, a proposed recommendation that receives an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the voting members of the DCTF may be transmitted. The following voting protocol, described in the DCTF Charter, was used to conduct straw polls and final voting on DCTF recommendations:

- **Thumbs Down:** I do not agree with the proposal. I feel the need to block its adoption and propose an alternative.
- **Thumbs Sideways:** I can accept the proposal although I do not necessarily support it.
- **Thumbs Up:** I think this proposal is the best choice of the options available to us.
- **Abstention:** At times, a pending decision may be infeasible for a Member to weigh in on.

Thumbs up and thumbs sideways are *both* counted as affirmative votes in determining whether a recommendation has the required 14-vote majority.