

Meeting Summary - DCTF Executive Committee May 29, 2025

Meeting Participants

EC Members Present	Geoff Bettencourt, Mike Cunningham, Nick Krieger, Dick Ogg, Randy Smith, Troy Wakefield, Zach Rotwein
EC Members Absent	Bill Blue
Other Meeting Participants	Ryan Bartling, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Elizabeth Brauer, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Katie Cieri, Ocean Protection Council 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 Captain Brent Chase, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife Rachelle Fisher, DCTF Administrative Team Kelly Sayce, DCTF Administrative Team Noelia Aponte-Silva, DCTF Administrative Team

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. 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 2025.
- [Agenda topics](#), meeting agreements, and [guidelines for providing public comment](#) were reviewed. 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.

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

3. Updates on the Dungeness crab fishery, including, but not limited to, DCTF elections and appointments, the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP), Take Reduction Team (TRT), the status of DCTF recommendations, etc.

The Admin Team (i.e., the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the Ocean Protection Council (OPC), and Strategic Earth) provided updates on various topics related to the Dungeness crab fishery.

- *DCTF Elections:* Christy provided an update on DCTF elections, with ballots expected to be mailed by the following week. If you are a commercial Dungeness crab permitholder with a homeport in Crescent City, Trinidad, Fort Bragg (includes all ports in Mendocino County), San Francisco (includes ports within San Francisco Bay), or South Half Moon Bay (includes all ports from Monterey Bay south) and you do not receive a ballot soon, please contact Christy Juhasz (Christy.Juhasz@wildlife.ca.gov, 707-292-2480). Ballots must be postmarked by June 30, 2025.
- *DCTF Non-commercial Fishing Appointments:* OPC was working to fill four (4) non-commercial fishing seats - recreational fishing (voting), recreational fishing (nonvoting), crab processing (voting), and nongovernmental organization (nonvoting). Nominations were open in March, and nominees were interviewed by OPC staff in April. OPC staff have made recommendations to the Secretary of Natural Resources for filling those seats. Final appointments are anticipated to be announced in mid- to late June, with appointees seated by the end of August.
- *Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP):* The CDFW submitted proposed RAMP regulatory changes (§ 132.8 to Title 14 CCR) to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) in the spring. CDFW is awaiting additional information and anticipates an effective date for the regulations to be November 1, 2025.
 - *Line-Marking:* When RAMP is implemented, all commercial crab lines will be required to have specific marking (i.e., purple and black line). OPC allocated funding for the purchase of line for the commercial Dungeness crab fleet. CDFW is working with the industry on a distribution plan, including location and timing, to get the line in the hands of permit holders prior to the season opener. More information will be mailed to permit holders and circulated on the DCTF email list as it becomes available. CDFW also explained that a rulemaking process is underway to prohibit other fisheries (e.g., the recreational Dungeness crab fishery and other commercial fisheries) from using the purple and black line and the line colors designated in Oregon and Washington.
- *Take Reduction Team:* CDFW explained that the TRT for Dungeness crab has been delayed until next year. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is initiating the TRT with sablefish and is anticipated to bring in other fisheries, such as Dungeness crab, in March/April 2026. A workshop will be hosted where NMFS scientists will share updated information with the public, and the public can provide comments. It is unclear when NMFS will appoint Dungeness crab representatives to the TRT and whether they will be invited to observe the discussions on sablefish, including the meetings where they will be setting the stage and sharing background information.
- *DCTF Recommendations:* Strategic Earth shared that the [recommendations from the DCTF's October 2024 meeting](#) were shared with the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (i.e., the Legislature), CDFW, and the Fish and Game Commission in late 2024. Strategic Earth spoke to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) about their ability to use funds from the Dungeness Crab Account surplus to support DCTF fishery objectives. PSMFC is willing to receive the funds and provide support. However, there has not been a legislator to-date who has been willing to author a bill related to the DCTF's 2024 recommendations so, there has been no change in the status of the Dungeness Crab Account surplus, the 96-hour gear servicing requirement, transiting a closed area with crab onboard a vessel, funding for industry-led surveys, or streamlined reporting. An update regarding the DCTF's recommendation around the expansion of lost gear recovery was discussed later in the meeting.

EC Members discussed the updates:

- **Line Marking:** EC Members explained concerns about penalties for unauthorized use of marked commercial Dungeness crab lines and the importance of outreach and penalties to prevent misuse. The conversation ended with a discussion on surface buoy marking regulations, with plans to continue discussions on potential updates. Another EC Member confirmed with CDFW that only the surface line will be required to be marked for the 2025-26 season, however, it is still unclear if all buoys will be required to be marked with a "D." An EC Member requested clarity on marking buoys with a "D" as soon as possible so fishermen have ample time to put their gear together for the 2025-26 fishing season.

Public Comment

- Karla Garibay Garcia, student, requested clarification on why the RAMP regulations have not been approved by OAL yet. CDFW explained that some changes may be needed to the package submitted to OAL, and CDFW is awaiting further direction from OAL. Any changes to the regulatory package will be publicly announced before it is finalized.
4. *Discuss and consider priority topics identified during the October 2024 DCTF meeting, including, but not limited to:*

4a. Receive updates about the voluntary post-season lost-gear retrieval efforts recommended by the DCTF and discuss continued interests and concerns with respect to lost gear retrieval.

Context: The DCTF made a recommendation for the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association (PCFFA) and the Nature Conservancy (TNC) to work collaboratively to expand California's voluntary lost-gear retrieval efforts by working with industry and coordinating the use of a user-friendly smartphone app. The app would enable commercial Dungeness crab fishermen and all other boaters to document the latitude and longitude of lost gear from images taken on the water and track retrieval efforts. They shared that crowdsourcing lost trap location data will better support a coastwide, voluntary lost gear recovery effort by the fleet.

Lisa Damrosch, PCFFA, [presented an update](#) on their and TNC's efforts to respond to the DCTF's recommendation. She explained that a version of this program has been operating since 2015 as a voluntary initiative in various ports, including Half Moon Bay and San Francisco. With funding support from OPC, plans are in place to expand the program to additional ports, including Eureka, by providing training materials and support. Gear recovery efforts will need to be tailored to the unique characteristics of each port (e.g., access to gear storage facilities, port-wide coordination). She emphasized the importance of port coordinators in supporting these efforts. A smartphone app, called "Crab Gear," enables port coordinators to track lost gear and will be expanded to allow whale watchers and the broader maritime community to report lost gear. The app will also include a listserv option for news updates and the dissemination of information.

Discussion:

- EC Members generally expressed support for these efforts and requested PCFFA and TNC continue to keep the DCTF updated on their progress.
- EC Members reported seeing less lost gear this commercial fishing season.

4a. Receive updates about the voluntary post-season lost-gear retrieval efforts recommended by the DCTF and discuss continued interests and concerns with respect to lost gear retrieval.

- One EC member expressed support for updating the app so that it identifies when gear is recovered. Ms. Damrosch shared that there may be some challenges with app users making that update, but port coordinators will report the recovery of each trap and total recovery numbers.
- Another EC Member stated that they would reach out to Ms. Damrosch to help coordinate recovery efforts in their port.
- An EC Member shared that an effective port coordinator is essential to simplify and streamline lost gear recovery efforts. However, identifying the location of lost fishing gear remains a significant hurdle.

Public Comment:

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

Conclusion: The EC and DCTF will continue to receive updates as this program progresses.

4b. Discuss surface buoy marking requirements.

Context: Current Regulations require all commercial Dungeness crab buoys to be marked with the commercial fishing license number of the vessel operator. During the September Executive Committee call and October DCTF meeting, there was continued conversation around whether or not this regulation should be updated so that the Dungeness crab permit number is on the buoy. CDFW explained the legal implications of this change (e.g., the permit holder may be liable for the actions of their operator, such as if a trap were found in a marine protected area (MPA)). The DCTF requested that the Executive Committee continue to explore this topic.

Discussion:

- EC Members expressed challenges with replacing buoys when a vessel has a different boat operator. Other Members questioned how widespread the issue was and stated that many permit holders had no problems with the current regulations. If regulations were changed and buoys were required to be marked differently, it would be a big expense for much of the fleet. Those with multiple captains explained it was an issue.
- One EC Member asked if he was allowed to put two license numbers on his buoys. CDFW explained that more than one license number on a buoy was allowed.
- EC Members discussed various options to address this issue, including: status quo (requiring license numbers on buoys), replacing license numbers with Dungeness crab permit numbers that are associated with the vessel, or not requiring any numbers on the buoys since the trap tags already have a permit number on them.
 - CDFW explained that for the whale entanglement issue, significant buoy markings have been crucial in identifying the sources of entanglements. The writing on buoy tags is often not visible when reviewing entanglement photographs. As a result, CDFW

4b. Discuss surface buoy marking requirements.

would have concerns with removing the significant buoy markings altogether.

- An EC Member asked if a vessel operator could pull buoys with a permit holder's license number, with a note from the permit holder. CDFW explained that this could be an option to address this issue and would investigate the legality of this option.

Public Comment:

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

Conclusion: The discussion highlights the need for a simple and practical solution that addresses the concerns of both operators and enforcement. CDFW will investigate whether the Fish and Game Code Section 9002 allowance for written permission to pull traps applies to Dungeness crab.

4c. Explore the use of buoy trackers as a way to reduce and recover lost gear.

Context: During the October DCTF meeting, Members expressed interest in exploring the use of buoy trackers to track lost gear and, ultimately, help address lost gear and whale entanglement issues. Strategic Earth shared [preliminary research](#) on what options were available and requested the EC's guidance on where to take the conversation.

Discussion:

- EC Members explained that the buoy tracker options currently available are cost-prohibitive. They suggested that unless buoy trackers were \$5 or less per trap, they would not be a viable solution at this time, especially since there are currently other financial burdens on the fleet (e.g., line replacement).

Public Comment:

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

Conclusion: The Executive Committee agreed to pause continued discussions of buoy trackers until more financially viable options were available.

5. Identify priority topics for future EC discussions and the fall 2025 DCTF meeting.

- There are two more EC meetings planned through September 2025. The DCTF Meeting is anticipated to be held in October/November 2025.
- The EC identified additional topics for future EC and DCTF agendas, including, but not limited to:
 - Continued updates on coordinated lost gear recovery efforts by PCFFA and TNC.
 - Exploration of proposals for regulatory changes to allow vessel operators to pull more than six (6) untagged, lost, or derelict traps per trip during the commercial fishing season. It was explained that this regulation was especially an issue when depth restrictions are in place.

- Discussion around addressing the concern from the fleet that, despite being allowed to fish only half of their traps in the Central Management Area for multiple seasons, they are still required to pay for all of their trap tags.
- An EC Member had previously expressed interest in continuing a discussion around allowing fishermen to sell crab when pulling another person's gear with a waiver. CDFW explained that the conditions placed on the waiver permit have been updated such that if an applicant has no or few minor violations, they will likely be allowed to sell the crab. Various EC Members were satisfied with this response and did not think it needed further attention from the EC or DCTF at this time.
- An EC Member expressed frustration that the legislature is not responding to the DCTF's recommendations and asked what the fleet can do about it. Strategic Earth shared the DCTF's report with Legislative offices to try to get the recommendations addressed. There have been challenges identifying a legislative champion for fisheries issues in California this year. This is one of the challenges of the Dungeness crab fishery being managed by the Legislature. All Members of the fleet are encouraged to reach out to local legislators to talk to them about taking action on the [DCTF's 2024 recommendations](#).

Public Comment

- Lisa Damrosch, PCFFA, explained that PCFFA shared a letter with Legislators over the past few months and has also had little success. The organization is working hard to keep Legislators educated on fisheries issues and find champions for fisheries issues.

6. 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.
 - Schedule the next EC meeting and circulate an agenda in accordance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act.
- CDFW will:
 - Continue to engage with folks and answer questions about RAMP and timing for regulatory updates, distribution of line, etc.
 - Investigate whether the Fish and Game Code Section 9002 allowance for written permission to pull traps applies to Dungeness crab.

The next EC meeting is anticipated for July 2025. More details will be shared on the [DCTF webpage](#) and through the [DCTF email list](#).