



2025 Annual Report: Dungeness Crab Task Force Recommendations and Progress Update

Submitted to:

- Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, Mike McGuire, Chair
- Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, Diane Papan, Vice Chair
- California Fish and Game Commission, Erika Zavaleta, President
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Charlton Bonham, Director

Copied to:

- California Ocean Protection Council, Jenn Eckerle, Executive Director
- California Fish and Game Commission, Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director
- California Fish and Game Commission, Susan Ashcraft, Marine Advisor
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Craig Shuman, Marine Region Manager
- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Caren Braby, Sr. Program Manager
- Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, Chris Nielsen, Consultant

Date:

November 20, 2025

Prepared By:

The Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF), with support from Strategic Earth Consulting.

For questions regarding this report or the DCTF recommendations, please contact:

Strategic Earth Consulting

1171 Robertson Blvd., Suite 352, Los Angeles, CA 90035

✉ Email: info@dungenesscrabtaskforce.com

🌐 <https://opc.ca.gov/dungeness-crab-task-force/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) submits this annual report in accordance with Fish and Game Code §8276.4, which requires the DCTF to provide updates and recommendations regarding the management of California's Dungeness crab fishery to the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (the Legislature), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the Fish and Game Commission. This report summarizes the DCTF's 2025 discussions, consensus recommendations, and priorities to support an adaptive, sustainable, and economically viable crab fishery. The DCTF continues to serve as a critical advisory body to the Legislature, CDFW, and the

Fish and Game Commission, helping ensure management decisions are informed by input from the fleet and other stakeholders.

Key Highlights:

- **Legislative Recommendations for a fishery omnibus bill** to extend sunset dates for Dungeness crab statutes (Fish and Game Code §8276.1–8280.6 and §9002.5), ensuring continuity of current management programs while allowing periodic review and updates. In addition, recommendations were made to follow up on and request the Legislature’s support in advancing the DCTF’s 2024 outstanding recommendations, including management of surplus Dungeness crab trap limit program funds, extending the gear servicing requirement to align with the recreational fishery or the commercial fisheries in Oregon and Washington, and the development of legal pathways for vessels to transit closed management zones with crab onboard.
- **Guidance to California fisheries managers, including the Legislature and CDFW**, to help them advocate on behalf of California’s Dungeness crab fishery on federal marine life entanglement issues that impact this state-managed fishery.
- **Request to establish a regular Title 14 rulemaking schedule** for CDFW to adaptively manage the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) and other aspects of the commercial Dungeness crab fishery, ensuring proactive, transparent, and coordinated management of the Dungeness crab fishery in alignment with DCTF guidance.
- **Recommendation for CDFW to develop a means for in-season lost gear recovery when a depth restriction is in place**, ensuring timely gear recovery, to reduce whale entanglement risk.

Details on the DCTF’s recommendations are available in this report and in the [DCTF’s October 15-16, 2025 meeting summary](#).

The DCTF appreciates the opportunity to advance and inform the management of the Dungeness crab fishery in partnership with the Legislature, CDFW, and FGC. The DCTF’s work was completed pursuant to Fish and Game Code (FGC) §8276.4 with financial support as directed by Fish and Game Code §8276.5.

Additional information, including [background details about the Dungeness crab fishery](#) and [the DCTF](#), is available on the [DCTF webpage](#).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DCTF VOTES AND ANALYSIS

The DCTF developed the following recommendations during a two-day meeting on October 15-16, 2025. The recommendations reflect the agreements of DCTF Members present at the meeting (as per the voting protocols defined in the [DCTF Charter](#)). However, in some cases, the recommendations are not the *verbatim* language used when the votes were taken. Because of the iterative nature of the conversations at the DCTF meetings, the language of some recommendations has been adjusted to improve clarity. The additional context and the voting record will be included in the meeting summary, which will be posted on the DCTF’s webpage when available. Explanatory notes are provided below each recommendation when necessary.

DCTF RECOMMENDATIONS — October 15-16, 2025

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #	Legislative, Regulatory, or Administrative Change Requested?	Audience for Recommendation	Vote Count (14 affirmatives needed to pass a recommendation)
1: Request for a fishery omnibus bill	☒ Legislative ☐ Regulatory ☐ Administrative	☒ Legislature ☐ CDFW ☐ FGC	16 affirmative (9 up, 7 sideways) 1 opposed 4 absent
2: Guidance to California fishery managers on federal issues that impact the commercial Dungeness crab fishery	☐ Legislative ☐ Regulatory ☐ Administrative	☒ Legislature ☒ CDFW ☒ FGC	16 affirmative (16 up) 1 opposed 4 absent
3: Establish a Regular CDFW Rulemaking and Adaptive Management Schedule	☒ Legislative ☐ Regulatory ☐ Administrative	☒ Legislature ☒ CDFW ☐ FGC	16 affirmative (16 up) 0 opposed 5 absent
4: Create a means for lost gear recovery when a depth restriction is in place	☐ Legislative ☒ Regulatory ☒ Administrative	☐ Legislature ☒ CDFW ☐ FGC	16 affirmative (16 up) 0 opposed 5 absent

General Dungeness Crab Fishery Management

FGC §8276.4 mandates that the DCTF discuss refining commercial Dungeness crab fishery management and the need for statutory changes to accomplish DCTF objectives. The DCTF identified relevant regulatory and legislative needs to help resolve issues the industry has faced in recent years.

Recommendation 1. Request for a fisheries omnibus bill.

The DCTF requests a fishery omnibus bill to address the following Dungeness crab fishery priorities:

- Extend the sunset dates for Fish and Game Code §8276.1, §8276.2, §8276.3, §8276.4, §8276.5, §8279.1, §8280.1, §8280.2, §8280.3, §8280.4, §8280.6, and §9002.5 to April 1, 2039.
- Reaffirm the [DCTF's 2024 recommendations](#) to:
 - Transfer surplus funds in the Dungeness crab account (§8276.5) to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and require an annual accounting audit of the account (Recommendation 1a)
 - Increase the 96-hour gear servicing requirement (Recommendation 2)
 - Allow vessels to transit a closed area with crab onboard (Recommendation 3)

Vote of all DCTF Members (ex officio Members abstained):

Thumbs up	Thumbs Sideways	Thumbs Down	Abstained	Absent
9	7	1	0	4

Rationale/Context:

The California Dungeness crab fishery is managed by the Legislature, and a fisheries omnibus bill in the 2026-27 legislative cycle would address a number of fishery priorities. Below is additional information, rationale, and context on Recommendation 1.

Sunsetting Fish and Game Codes

The Dungeness crab management framework established in the California Fish and Game Code, including §§8276.1–8276.5, §§8279.1, §§8280.1–8280.4, §8280.6, and §9002.5, provides the statutory foundation for the orderly and sustainable operation of California's Dungeness crab fishery. These sections collectively govern critical aspects of the fishery, including permit structure, trap limits, gear marking, lost gear recovery, vessel operations, and the DCTF. Many of these code sections will become inoperable on April 1, 2029. An extension of these code sections will ensure the commercial fishery can maintain effective governance without disruption or uncertainty that could arise if statutory authorities lapse, especially as the fishery continues to respond to marine life entanglement issues. Reauthorizing these sections would also ensure the continuation of the DCTF, which has proven instrumental in advising the Legislature on the commercial Dungeness crab fishery and in facilitating communication between the fleet, regulators, and policymakers. The DCTF looks forward to continuing to review these code sections every few years and providing guidance to the Legislature on modifications to ensure the statutes reflect current management needs and are relevant and supportive of a sustainable, economically viable, and environmentally responsible Dungeness crab fishery.

Managing the Dungeness Crab Account's Surplus

Fish and Game Code §8276.5 establishes the Dungeness Crab Trap Limit Program (DCTLTP). Revenues collected through the DCTLTP are deposited in the Dungeness Crab Account, and their use is restricted to 1) administration and enforcement of the DCTLTP; and 2) supporting the administration and facilitation of the DCTF. As of the 2023–24 fiscal year, the [most recent accounting](#) shows an end-of-year balance of approximately \$3 million in the Dungeness Crab Account (see Appendix 4). At the October 2025 DCTF meeting, the California Department of Fish

and Wildlife (CDFW) reported that the Department of Finance requires the account to maintain a reserve sufficient to cover CDFW's two-year spending authority of \$1.1 million. This leaves an estimated excess balance of at least \$828,000 in the account.

In 2024, the DCTF recommended that these excess funds be used to support fleet-identified priorities. [Recommendation 1a from the 2024 Legislative Report](#) stated:

"The DCTF recommends the surplus funds sitting in the Dungeness Crab Account (FGC §8276.5) that continue to accrue in excess of CDFW and the DCTF's expenditures be deposited in an interest-bearing account managed and overseen by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC). Any continued surplus in the Dungeness crab account should be deposited to PSMFC biannually. The DCTF expects PSMFC to work in partnership with the DCTF and CDFW to use these funds in a fashion that is in alignment with the DCTF's identified priorities. The funds should not be used without approval from the DCTF and should not be utilized by the Tri-State Dungeness Crab Commission."

The DCTF remains interested in working collaboratively with PSMFC to identify and advance appropriate funding priorities. Potential uses may include, but are not limited to, gear retrieval programs, vessel surveys, applied research, and the testing or adoption of new technologies that enhance fishery operations and sustainability.

Consistent with Fish and Game Code §8276.5, which requires CDFW to provide an annual accounting of DCTLP expenditures, the DCTF further recommends that PSMFC provide an annual audit of the interest-bearing account. Transparent and responsible management of these funds will help ensure that revenues generated through the DCTLP are used effectively and support the long-term needs and priorities of the Dungeness crab industry.

If a surplus continues to accrue, the DCTF may provide a future recommendation to address and prevent an ongoing surplus.

[96-Hour Gear Servicing Requirement](#)

The DCTF continues to reaffirm their [2024](#), [2021](#), and [2020](#) recommendations to amend the 96-hour (4 days) gear servicing requirement (FGC §9004) to allow no less than a 7-day and up to a 9-day soak time, weather permitting, for commercial Dungeness crab, in alignment with §29.80 Title 14, CCR for the California recreational Dungeness crab fishery.

Servicing commercial gear every 96 hours, particularly later in the season when crab abundance is lower, is neither economically viable nor environmentally efficient. The cost of vessel operations and crew time often exceeds the value of the catch, and requiring frequent trips increases fuel consumption and emissions. Allowing a longer servicing interval would reduce these economic and environmental burdens while improving operational flexibility. Fishermen have also noted that the current 96-hour limit discourages retrieval of lost gear, as they must prioritize servicing gear within the short legal timeframe rather than locating displaced traps.

The DCTF acknowledges concerns expressed by CDFW and environmental organizations regarding potential entanglement risk or increased gear loss; however, there is no evidence that extending the servicing interval would increase either case. The DCTF emphasizes that the fleet strongly opposes marine life entanglements and would not support any measure that could increase such risk. Furthermore, neighboring states of Oregon and Washington don't have service interval limits, but require a landing every two weeks ([OAR 635-005-0485](#) and [WAC 220-340-480](#)).

Regarding gear loss, the DCTF maintains that loss is primarily caused by weather and marine traffic, not servicing intervals. The fishery already has several mechanisms to address gear loss, including: a lost fishing gear recovery program (Fish and Game Code §9002.5; §132.7, Title 14, CCR), in-season and post-season retrieval allowances (§132.2, Title 14, CCR), and the [RAMP](#) (§132.8, Title 14, CCR), which provide an ability to account for these efforts.

Maintaining the 96-hour servicing interval imposes unnecessary economic and environmental costs on the fleet without providing measurable conservation benefits. A service interval of no less than 7 days and up to 9 days would promote regulatory consistency, environmental efficiency, and economic viability while maintaining strong protections for marine life.

Transiting a Closed Area with Crab Onboard

In [2024, the DCTF unanimously adopted a recommendation](#) (Recommendation 3) for the development of legal pathways to allow fishermen to transit a closed management zone while in possession of Dungeness crab, under strict conditions. FGC §8276.1(c) makes it unlawful to “take or possess Dungeness crab from any waters closed”, and, as a result, CDFW Law Enforcement has determined that vessels may only transit a closed area with traps onboard only if no crab are onboard the vessel. These regulations create operational burdens for fishermen working near open management zones who need to land crab legally while complying with closures.

To address this, the DCTF recommends that vessel operators:

1. **Submit a declaration** to CDFW’s Marine Enforcement Division before transit, designating the port of landing and outlining procedures in case of mechanical failure or breakdown during transit.
2. **Transit continuously** along a direct, expeditious route without stopping or loitering, consistent with federal and California regulations.
3. Have a **CDFW-approved electronic monitoring system** fully operational during transit to ensure compliance.
4. **Secure gear** so that traps are rendered unusable (e.g., trap doors tied open, traps strapped to the deck), similar to transit rules in Oregon, Washington, and federal groundfish fisheries.

The DCTF further recommends that CDFW provide an exemption process for vessels experiencing mechanical issues during transit. Electronic monitoring devices would record deviations, allowing enforcement and management to account for unavoidable circumstances while maintaining protection of crab in closed zones.

This approach balances regulatory compliance, operational efficiency, and enforcement needs, providing fishermen with a legal pathway to transport crab without compromising closed zone protections.

Recommendation 2. Guidance to California fishery managers on federal issues that impact the commercial Dungeness crab fishery

The DCTF recommends that California fishery managers, including the California Legislature and CDFW, advocate to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to delist Humpback whale populations that have recovered and are no longer considered endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Where additional information is required for this action, the DCTF recommends prioritizing funding for research to support informed decision-making.

The DCTF further recommends that the Legislature and CDFW advocate for NMFS to adjust the entanglement triggers that lead to fishing restrictions and management actions in the Dungeness crab fishery to be less restrictive, ensuring management actions balance protection of whale populations with the operational and economic needs of the fleet.

Vote of all DCTF Members (ex officio Members abstained):

Thumbs up	Thumbs Sideways	Thumbs Down	Abstained	Absent
16	0	1	0	4

Rationale/Context:

This recommendation was developed in part as a response to how the DCTF could respond to the [NMFS's 2025 request for comments on the Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness](#), which directs federal agencies to improve the sustainability, resilience, and competitiveness of U.S. seafood fisheries. The commercial Dungeness crab fishery is a state-managed fishery; however, federal drivers such as the ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) are threatening the economic viability of the fleet.

The RAMP program (§132.8, Title 14, CCR) was implemented to mitigate marine life entanglements in the Dungeness crab fishery and serves as an essential tool for the fishery to obtain an incidental take permit and comply with the ESA and MMPA. While research has shown that humpback whale populations have continued to grow since 1989^{1,2} indicating that delisting the Mexico-Pacific stock of humpback whales may be warranted, CDFW, in consultation with NMFS, has continued to keep [entanglement triggers/standards for the fishery](#) low. As populations increase, the probability of interactions with fishing gear naturally rises; however, the trigger of three entanglements to close the fishery disproportionately impacts the industry. Until the stock is removed from the ESA list, triggers for management actions and closures in the Dungeness crab fishery will remain low, causing continued economic harm to the Dungeness crab fishery and California fishing fleets. The DCTF recommends that the California Legislature and CDFW encourage NMFS and the federal government to revisit the Recovery Plan for the Mexico-Pacific stock of humpback whales and prioritize funding for research targeting a population assessment as needed to delist this stock.

¹ Calambokidis, J. and J. Barlow. 2020. Updated abundance estimates for blue and humpback whales along the U.S. West Coast using data through 2018, U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SWFSC-634. <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/27104>

² NOAA Fisheries. 2023. Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae kuzira*) Mainland Mexico - California - Oregon - Washington Stock. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2023-08/Humpback-Whale-Mainland-Mexico-2022.pdf>

The DCTF encourages fishing associations and other partners to incorporate this recommendation into advocacy and discussions with the federal administration and Executive Branch, fostering collaboration toward the shared goal of thriving fisheries and healthy whale populations.

Recommendation 3. Establish a Regular CDFW Rulemaking and Adaptive Management Schedule

The DCTF recommends that the Legislature require CDFW to establish a rulemaking schedule for the California Code of Regulations, Title 14 (CCR T14), so that the fishery and the associated RAMP program can be adaptively managed as informed by DCTF recommendations.

Vote of all DCTF Members (ex officio Members abstained):

Thumbs up	Thumbs Sideways	Thumbs Down	Abstained	Absent
16	0	0	0	5

Rationale/Context:

CDFW developed the RAMP at the direction of the Legislature to reduce whale entanglement risk in the Dungeness crab fishery. In the second half of 2025, CDFW completed the regulatory process for the [second iteration of RAMP regulations](#), reflecting the agency's ongoing commitment to incorporating new information, fishermen's input, and adaptive management principles into the program.

As the updated RAMP regulations are implemented, the DCTF recognizes the need to establish a regular rulemaking schedule to support adaptive management with ongoing review and improvement of RAMP and other components of the fishery, such as the lost gear retrieval program. A formalized, recurring process and timeline would allow fishery managers to proactively adjust regulations in response to changing ocean conditions, whale populations, and fishery dynamics—rather than relying on ad hoc updates.

A structured rulemaking schedule would also improve transparency, predictability, and efficiency in regulatory updates, while ensuring alignment with stakeholder priorities and DCTF recommendations. A predictable timeline would provide fishermen, managers, and other stakeholders with clearer expectations for when regulatory items will be reviewed and discussed, improving participation and coordination across all levels of management. Regular adaptive management would also support better coordination with federal partners, including NMFS, particularly as the [West Coast Take Reduction Team](#) develops strategies to protect whales.

The precedent for such a process already exists. The Fish and Game Commission currently publishes an anticipated regulatory timetable each year outlining the expected timing of major regulatory items. For example:

- **February:** Review new petitions and update the rulemaking timetable.
- **April / June:** Discuss or adopt items identified earlier in the year.
- **October:** Review and act on additional regulatory matters.

While this example timetable is not legally binding, it serves as a transparent planning tool that helps stakeholders anticipate when topics will be discussed and promotes consistent engagement. A similar approach for the Dungeness crab fishery would provide predictability, streamline

planning, and strengthen accountability.

In addition, emergency rulemaking processes should remain available for urgent or unforeseen management needs, ensuring the state can act swiftly when necessary.

Establishing a recurring, timely, and transparent regulatory review cycle would reinforce California's commitment to adaptive management, improve stakeholder participation, and strengthen the long-term sustainability and resilience of the Dungeness crab fishery.

Recommendation 4. Create a means for lost gear recovery when a depth restriction is in place

The DCTF recommends that CDFW develop a mechanism to authorize vessels to retrieve more than six lost or derelict traps outside depth restriction zones during the fishing season when a depth restriction is in effect.

Vote of all DCTF Members (ex officio Members abstained):

Thumbs up	Thumbs Sideways	Thumbs Down	Abstained	Absent
16	0	0	0	5

Rationale/Context:

When a depth restriction is implemented under the RAMP program, fishing gear often migrate into restricted areas or may be left behind in areas that were previously open to fishing. Currently, permitted commercial Dungeness crab vessels may retrieve no more than six lost or derelict traps per trip during the season, including when a depth restriction is in place. This limit can be challenging because gear often accumulates in high-risk zones due to currents or adverse weather, rather than noncompliance. Timely recovery of this gear is critical to reduce whale entanglements, minimize environmental impacts, and prevent gear from being scattered until after the season closes.

Section 132.2 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations allows permit holders to request a waiver so that someone may be exempted from the in-season allowance of 6 traps in order to retrieve their gear under hardship conditions (e.g., vessel or operator incapacitation). However, this provision would not exempt someone from retrieving more trap gear in the closed depth-restricted area.

To resolve this limitation, a statutory or regulatory change may be needed to allow vessels to transit open areas under RAMP protocols while conducting retrievals. If large quantities of lost gear remain unrecovered, CDFW enforcement may be called to remove the gear and issue citations, but the fleet prefers to conduct this gear recovery when possible.

The DCTF recommends that CDFW explore mechanisms for in-season retrieval beyond the current six-trap limit when a depth restriction due to RAMP is in place. The DCTF also recommends that CDFW follow up with the DCTF on this recommendation and share its assessment of the regulatory or statutory changes needed to implement it in future seasons.

DCTF NEXT STEPS

The DCTF appreciates the continued collaboration of CDFW, the Fish and Game Commission, the Ocean Protection Council, and the Legislature. The DCTF also acknowledges the contributions of fishing industry members, environmental organizations, and other partners committed to the sustainable management of California's Dungeness crab fishery.

The DCTF anticipates meeting again in the Fall of 2026 to continue addressing high-priority topics and emerging issues related to the Dungeness crab fishery. The DCTF's Executive Committee will continue to meet between now and then, helping to advance discussions and develop ideas for the full DCTF's review and deliberations. The DCTF may meet before this time, should any timely issues arise, that would benefit from the DCTF's guidance. Following each meeting, the DCTF plans to continue issuing these reports to ensure that recommendations are shared promptly and can inform management actions while they remain relevant. The DCTF remains committed to supporting the needs of the Dungeness crab industry, the Legislature, CDFW, and the Fish and Game Commission, providing guidance on the priorities outlined in this report and responding to new challenges as they emerge, all in pursuit of a sustainable, safe, and resilient fishery.