

Meeting Summary
DCTF Executive Committee
May 25, 2023

Meeting Participants

EC Members Present Bill Blue, Mike Cunningham, Nick Krieger (Replacement for John Barnett), Dick Ogg, Zach Rotwein, Randy Smith, Troy Wakefield

EC Members Absent Geoff Bettencourt

Other Meeting Participants Noah Ben-Aderet, Ocean Protection Council
Ryan Bartling, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife
Captain Brent Chase, 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
Kelly Sayce, 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 it has been posted (a minimum of 10 days in advance of 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. Administrative item: Discuss changes in Executive Committee participation

- John Barnett stepped down as the DCTF San Francisco upper production level representative. He has identified an alternate to fill his seat until the next election in 2025, however, as they are new to the DCTF process, the San Francisco DCTF Members have requested Nick Kreiger, the San Francisco lower production level representative, to fill in on the EC until the next DCTF meeting where a formal confirmation process will occur. The Administrative team and other members of the Executive Committee had no objections or concerns with Mr. Kreiger participating on the EC.

3. Public comments on non-agenda items.

- Molly Won Glickman, a student at Stanford University, expressed gratitude towards the DCTF for participating in her study on the Dungeness crab fishery and management strategies to mitigate marine life entanglement risk. Her research has concluded, and results are available upon request. Email mollywg@stanford.edu for more details.
- Ed Tavasieff, a commercial fisherman, suggested the DCTF/EC discuss expanding the RAMP 2.0 toolkit to require fishing on a weekly schedule with a few no-fishing days each week (e.g., allow fishing one day and no fishing the next) to reduce the quantity of gear in the water.

4. Updates involving the Dungeness crab fishery, including, but not limited to 2023 DCTF Election status, follow-up on October 2022 DCTF recommendations, Experimental Fishing Permits (EFPs), sport fishing changes, new CDFW positions, etc.

2022 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 will be sent out to the following ports and individuals: Eureka, Bodega Bay, Princeton-Half Moon Bay, and the Non-resident California Dungeness crab permit holder by the first week of June. More is available on the [DCTF's webpage](#) and further updates will be posted and circulated via the DCTF listserv.

- **Follow-up from the October DCTF meeting:** The Admin Team walked through the [DCTF's October 2022 recommendations](#) and provided updates on the status of each. There are no updates regarding the Trap retrieval program or the request for an economic analysis of the impacts of the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) at this time. Predetermined season opener dates were used during the 2022-23 commercial fishing season and received positive feedback. CDFW anticipates they will open the 2023-24 Dungeness crab season in a similar fashion. Line marking discussions between CDFW, OPC, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Oregon, and Washington are ongoing and will inform the development of language in RAMP 2.0. Regulations will not be imposed for the 2023-24 season.
- **Experimental Fishing Permits (EFP):** The California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) has approved four applications under the EFP program since April 2022. Of the four applications, two are for pop-up gear testing in the Dungeness crab fishery: [SubSea Sonics](#) and [Puget Buoy](#). The FGC will consider two more EFP applications during their June 14-15 meeting. For more information about EFP applications and approvals, please visit the [FGC website](#). Please visit [CDFW's website](#) if interested in the EFP application process.

Sport Fishing: During the October 2022 DCTF meeting, the recreational DCTF Members requested the EC discuss changes to changes to §29.80(c)(3), Title 14 CCR to allow recreational traps to utilize two main buoys instead of one. They asked the EC to continue discussing the topic. However, since the FGC is reviewing petitions from members of the recreational fishing community during their June 2023 meeting, this topic will not be on future Executive Committee meeting agendas.

- **CDFW positions:**
 - CDFW hired Ellie Brauer to fill Christy Juhasz's prior position. She is based in Monterey and will be supporting the Dungeness crab fishery as well as other crab industries throughout the state.
 - Ryan Bartling has been promoted to Senior Environmental Scientist, Supervisor and will continue to support the Whale Safe Fisheries Program. CDFW is in the final stages of filling his old position; they will be responsible for conducting risk assessments and facilitating the Whale Working Group meetings.

Public Comment

- No public comment was received on this agenda item.

5. 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 line marking, electronic monitoring, alternative gear, long lining gear, etc.

- Joanna Grebel, CDFW, provided updates on the status of the CDFW's efforts to amend RAMP (also known as RAMP 2.0) to address line marking, electronic monitoring, and other important details. The process to amend RAMP has been delayed until at least January 2024 while CDFW continues conversations with the industry, Oregon, and Washington to ensure the updated regulations are workable, enforceable, and effective.
- *Line Marking:* Line marking has been identified by CDFW and NMFS as a priority to eliminate penalties to the Dungeness crab fishery as a result of unidentified whale entanglement. RAMP 2.0 will include a requirement that Dungeness crab commercial fishing lines have markings that will be designated for the California Dungeness crab fishery. CDFW is considering a phased approach for implementing line marking regulations to help reduce the financial burden on the fleet. Based on conversations with the Tri-State Dungeness Crab Committee (Tri-State), California is proposing the use of a manufactured marked line using two colors. One color represents the state where the gear originated (i.e., California, Oregon, or Washington) and the other color represents the Dungeness crab fishery. The upper 20 fathoms of the line would be required to be marked with this manufactured marked line. CDFW is continuing conversations with the fleet on feasibility and will be conducting field testing of the manufactured marked line to determine if the selected colors are visible in the ocean. It is anticipated that line marking will not be required before the 2024-25 season. The EC discussed these updates.
 - An EC Member expressed concern about the phased approach for line marking especially if it took up to five years for the Dungeness crab fleet to be 100% compliant since the fishery would continue to be penalized for both marked and unmarked lines during that time. They supported a quicker transition to marked gear.
 - Another EC Member wanted to know about the ability to modify existing lines with paint to comply with the new line marking regulations in a much faster timespan rather than purchasing new lines over a period of time. They highlighted the financial challenges for the fleet to buy all new lines. They asked if CDFW or the Whale Working Group had researched whether the type of line (e.g., blue steel with weights, neutral buoyancy line) had a higher risk of entangling whales. They suspected that blue steel was problematic based on the entanglement photos they observed. If they are going to invest in the new line, they would like to invest in line types that entangle less often.
 - CDFW will explore the options to identify a simple, cost-conscious solution to marking lines that are coordinated with Oregon and Washington. They were unable to speak to the type of line that is associated with higher entanglement rates and are unsure if there will be enough time to do adequate research before making the regulations.
 - Another EC Member informed the group that a line profile study was completed a few years ago using the following line types: floating line, neutral line, and leads woven in lines. The study showed that the neutral line was weighted in a straighter, more linear profile than the floating blue steel line with leads woven in, which tended to make horizontal "W" shapes in the water column. They suggested this study be further explored. As a result of the study, some fishermen have changed their lines to neutral buoyancy lines to reduce potential entanglements.
- *Electronic Monitoring:* RAMP currently requires all commercial Dungeness crab permit holders to have an electronic monitoring tool on their vessel(s) during the 2023-24 season. CDFW developed a [Compliance Guide for the CA Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery Electronic Monitoring FAQs](#) to help the fleet operate in compliance with this new regulation. CDFW anticipates making clarifying amendments to the electronic monitoring regulations in RAMP 2.0. CDFW also shared that they have secured funding to provide electronic monitoring equipment for all active members of the California Dungeness crab fleet (i.e., permit holders who have landings in California within the last 5 seasons). CDFW is hopeful that the equipment will be ready for use at the beginning of the 2023-24 season.
 - An EC Member asked if solar loggers would be acceptable under the new RAMP 2.0 regulations.

- CDFW stated that equipment must automatically transmit data. Therefore, some types of solar loggers will still qualify, however, data plotters will no longer be considered compliant.
 - Another EC Member asked about the cost of the monthly or yearly subscription service associated with the devices CDFW was purchasing.
 - CDFW said they would provide the equipment and the vessel operator would be responsible for paying for the subscription service. CDFW is working with several vendors to promote competitive subscription prices and the option to only pay the subscription during the fishing season. In the future, likely in RAMP 3.0, CDFW is exploring the possibility of using hydraulic sensors to inform CDFW of the location and activities of vessels. The gear they anticipate purchasing for the fleet would be compatible with vessels of all sizes while allowing for hydraulic sensor capabilities. CDFW understands that the fleet has various types of hydraulic systems and therefore would need to have more conversations before implementation.

Industry-Led Surveys: Jenn Humberstone, the Nature Conservancy (TNC), gave overviews of both the fishing industry-led surveys and a vessel location monitoring program. The fishing industry-led surveys are conducted in coordination with California Coast Crab Association (CCCA), marine mammal research advisors, and CDFW to fill data gaps and inform RAMP decision-making, especially in RAMP zones 1 and 5. The vessel location monitoring program is intended to support successful cost-effective, streamlined implementation for CDFW and the fleet. TNC is working with CDFW to ensure the program aligns with its regulatory plan and timelines and will focus on synthesizing information around how various tools align with CDFW's management needs. As CDFW explores its interest in hydraulic sensors, these surveys will not be expanded but rather intended to complement and further streamline the process. Ms. Humberstone asked if the industry would like to continue to be informed about the results of these surveys and multiple EC members expressed interest in continued information sharing on these efforts.

- *RAMP toolbox:* Throughout the season, the fishing community continued to reflect on what it looked like to use some of the mitigation tools in the RAMP toolbox. For example, the season started with a 50% gear reduction in the Central management area (zones 3-6) and is ending with depth restrictions in the Northern management area (zones 1 and 2). Members of the fishing industry have requested more tools be added to the toolbox to increase opportunities for fishing. Some EC members expressed support for the predetermined season opener dates. The EC discussed other potential tools to reduce entanglement risk in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery.
 - *Gear Reduction:*
 - Some EC members expressed that much of the fleet was happy with reducing gear at the start of the season to help proactively reduce whale encounters while allowing fishing to commence sooner.
 - An EC member asked CDFW if they could regulate the number of lines in the water proportional to the concentration of whales in an area to allow for earlier openers.
 - CDFW stated that there was no formula to determine what number of lines in relation to the concentration of whales would constitute a low risk, especially by area.
 - The EC member proposed a 30% or less gear reduction when risk is elevated rather than the flat 50% gear reduction. CDFW asked what level of gear reduction would be reasonable to allow the fleet to fish sooner (e.g., 10%, 30%, 50%) while still being profitable. The EC member said it would depend on the volume of crabs being brought in and the number of traps they would need to monitor.
 - *Experimental Fishing Permits (EFP):*
 - All EC Members stated that fishing under an EFP should not be allowed before the start of the season and should only be allowed in the spring since it creates inequities within

the fleet.

- CDFW explained that the timing of fishing while using an EFP was at the discretion of the FGC. However, although the permit allows it, an EFP holder indicated that they do not intend to fish in the fall before the start of the season unless supported by the fleet.
- *Hoop Nets*: An EC Member suggested the group consider the use of hoop nets at the start of the commercial fishing season to allow fishing to commence sooner.
 - Various EC Members expressed opposition to the use of hoop nets and explained that the predetermined opener dates coupled with a gear reduction, similar to the 2022-23 opener, would be preferred rather than exploring any type of alternative gear including hoop nets. They explained the Dungeness crab fishery has become more expensive and the fleet should use the same gear throughout the season. Multiple EC members expressed their concerns by stating that they recover a lot of lost hoop nets, and they are only successful under calm ocean conditions.
 - CDFW clarified that hoop nets tend to be lighter and require more frequent tending than traditional gear.
- *Alternative Gear*: EC members expressed various concerns about pop-up gear including swells hindering gear visibility, uncertainty around the directionality and function of a pop-up gear rope with 200+ fathoms of line, failure of gear to pop up, etc.
- *Long Lining/Stringing Gear*: Some EC Members expressed support for allowing long-lining gear in the fleet. Some EC Members stated that while they were not interested in long-lining their own gear, they would not be concerned if others chose to. Some Members explained there needs to be a method to determine the direction the lines are heading in the water to prevent gear interactions and loss. One EC Member stated they thought that long-lining EFPs should only be available during the spring fishery.

Public Comment:

- Ed Tavasieff, a commercial fisherman, stated that the profitability of gear reduction depends on how much crab is available. He also expressed that alternative gear was not needed. Instead, traditional gear could be tended more frequently. For example, if fishermen were only allowed to fish during daylight hours there would be less gear over time in the water. There are cost-effective solutions to reduce the risk of entanglements using traditional gear.
- Shawn Flading, a commercial fisherman, stated that hoop nets were not feasible for the majority of the fleet because they use too much bait, are inefficient, and can only be fished in calm water. Regarding line marking, he suggests fishermen be allowed to mark their gear with spray paint. He stated that it was more cost-effective, more visible, and had a smaller environmental impact than purchasing new manufactured lines and that multiple EC members have tested this method. He would like line marking to be implemented as soon as possible. Concerning EFPs, he stated it was unfair to allow EFPs to test gear during the fall opener and suggested that they only be allowed in the spring. Lastly, regarding the tools used in RAMP, he expressed support for depth restrictions, gear reductions, and more frequent data collection through CDFW flyovers to mitigate entanglement risk.

6. Follow up discussion from the October 2022 DCTF meeting about the use of a sort box and whether or not current regulations are flexible enough to legally accommodate current fishing practices.

- The legal use of sort boxes in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was discussed at various DCTF and EC meetings over the last 2 years. During the October 2022 DCTF meeting members expressed concern about [CDFW's FAQ](#) and requested the EC address this issue. EC Members stated that they wanted to find solutions so that fishermen can legally use a sort box without receiving a violation when they are unable to continuously sort the crabs. However, since EC Members do not have any proposed solutions to address the issue at this time, this topic will be tabled until proposed solutions are presented by the public or a DCTF Member for consideration.

Public Comment:

- No public comment at this time.

7. *Confirm priority topics for 2023 DCTF and Executive Committee meetings including, but not limited to California's preseason quality testing protocols, regulating the whales best practices guide, reintroduction of sea otters, and transiting closed areas with crab onboard.*

- The next DCTF Executive Committee Meeting is anticipated for late June or early July 2023. The next DCTF Meeting is anticipated for October 2023.
- The EC reviewed and confirmed priority topics for the upcoming DCTF EC meeting. The EC identified the following topics as a high priority for the next EC meeting agenda (anticipated June/July) including:
 - Updating Tri-State testing protocol
 - Codifying the Whales Best Practices Guide
 - Reintroduction of sea otters
 - Transiting closed areas with crab onboard
 - 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 identified the following high-priority topics: updating Tri-State testing protocols, codifying the Whales Best Practices guide, considering vessel lengths on permits (issue includes removing vessel lengths on permits and addressing vessel length surveys during permit transfers), and considering a recommendation to limit fall fishing under an EFP (this final issue was rated the highest priority).
- The Admin Team clarified that RAMP and related topics (e.g., gear reduction, etc.) will continue to be a standing agenda item for all EC and DCTF meetings. They explained that the EFP discussion will be moved to the October DCTF meeting while the other three priorities will need to be discussed more by the EC during their next two scheduled meetings before moving to the full DCTF's fall meeting agenda. The other listed topics voted on that received less interest from the EC may be revisited as a future agenda item when the EC deems them as priorities.

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.**
 - **Schedule and develop an agenda for the late June/early July DCTF Executive Committee meeting and circulate it in accordance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act.**
- **CDFW will:**

- **Continue to engage with folks and answer questions about DCTF elections, RAMP, EFP ideas/process/application, long-lining/stringing, and expand fishing opportunities when the risk of whale entanglements is elevated.**

The next EC meeting is anticipated for late June/early July 2023. More details will be shared on the [DCTF webpage](#) and through the [DCTF email list](#).