

**Talking Points for the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture
43th Annual Fisheries Forum – February 11, 2016
California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF)**

Provided by Rachelle Fisher, Strategic Earth Consulting Senior Associate and DCTF Administrator

- My name is Rachelle Fisher and I serve as an Administrator of the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF). On behalf of the DCTF, I would like to thank this body for the opportunity to provide an update on topics and issues the DCTF has addressed in 2014 and 2015 – and will continue to address into 2016 – including domoic acid, a statewide lost fishing gear recovery program, and whale interactions with Dungeness crab fishing gear.
- The DCTF is charged by the legislature with discussing and making recommendations to inform the state on a wide range of issues related to the management of Dungeness crab fisheries (commercial and recreational). These management recommendations include the design, implementation, and evaluation of the recently implemented commercial trap limit program.
- Since we last presented to this body in 2014, the DCTF has circulated two reports—in January 2015 and 2016—to the Legislature, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Fish and Game Commission. These reports provided a number of recommendations across a range of topics; I will highlight two specifically:
 - The DCTF requested legislation to support an industry funded lost fishing gear recovery program. In brief, the proposed program requires strong coordination between the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement Division and those individuals (or organizations) recovering lost traps at the close of the commercial fishing season. Traps that are recovered would be impounded, and owners of the gear would be required to pay to have their traps returned. Fishermen who do not pay the associated fees may face more severe fines – these impound and recovery fees are intended pay for the program. It is our understanding that Senator McGuire’s office is taking the lead in forwarding this recommendation through the legislative process.
 - The DCTF has also recommended two regulatory changes that would require “clean up” legislation to address. These include:
 - allowing waivers on trap limit program fees for mandatory military service; and
 - amending Fish and Game Code 8279.1 so Dungeness crab **permitted vessels**, not **individual fishermen**, are subject to 30-day fair start restrictions.
- The DCTF looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to evaluate and fine-tune the trap limit program, the lost fishing gear recovery program, and other fisheries management priorities.
- In addition to the DCTF’s recommendations, there have been a number of issues the Dungeness crab industry has faced over the past year.
 - Since Spring 2015, the DCTF has proactively engaged in and supported discussions with state and federal agencies and conservation organizations to reduce the risk of whale entanglements in Dungeness crab fishing gear. The DCTF is committed to supporting the industry’s efforts to address this issue,

including supporting the efforts of the state initiated Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group.

- As you are aware, the opening of the commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries were delayed this year due to elevated levels of domoic acid.
 - The DCTF and greater Dungeness crab industry is greatly concerned about this issue and is working in close collaboration with California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the state public health agencies to ensure crab is safe for public consumption
 - Many DCTF Members have been actively involved in collecting crabs for domoic acid tests and/or assisting the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in coordinating those tests.
 - Following the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's announcement of a delay in the Dungeness crab fishing season, the DCTF Executive Committee, a subcommittee of the DCTF, provided guidance on testing protocols, considerations for opening the season, and how the timing of the opener would impact local and foreign markets to the California Department of Public Health, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, Fish and Game Commission, California Ocean Protection Council, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
 - Recent Executive Committee meetings have also served as an opportunity to share timely information from the state on the domoic acid issue and provide the fleet with updates on the status of testing and disaster relief efforts.
 - The Executive Committee continues to be available to the state to provide timely guidance from the industry on this unprecedented issue.
- The OPC's funding to administer the DCTF expires in early 2017. The DCTF may forward a recommendation to the Legislature in 2017 regarding long-term funding.
 - The DCTF may make a request to the Legislature in the 2017 report to appropriate some of the \$1.4M surplus funds from the trap limit program and/or consider other sources to fund the DCTF in the long-term.
 - The DCTF would like to work with the Legislature to explore options to keep the DCTF operating until a funding strategy is in place.
 - The DCTF has also expressed an interest to reflect on its progress since 2009, and looking forward may make recommendations to the Legislature to update or adjust the composition and functioning of the DCTF. Any information to this effect will be included in the DCTF's 2017 report.

DCTF Next Steps

The Legislature should anticipate a final report from the DCTF in January 2017. This report is anticipated to include additional recommendations, which may be informed by the ongoing evaluation of the trap limit program, as well as recommendations related to the long-term functioning of the DCTF.

- The DCTF would like to thank the California Department of Fish and Wildlife staff for their continued partnership and for their efforts to establish a strong working relationship with the DCTF over the past seven years.
- We would also like to thank the California Ocean Protection Council for financially supporting the DCTF since 2009, and the Legislature for their positive receipt of the DCTF's recommendations.
- The DCTF Administrative Team looks forward to working with the DCTF through 2017, and continuing to keep the Legislature informed on all DCTF-related work.

For more information about the DCTF, including all meeting summaries and reports, please visit the DCTF webpage: <http://www.opc.ca.gov/2009/04/dungeness-crab-task-force>.