

**FISH AND GAME COMMISSION  
STATEMENT OF EMERGENCY ACTION**

Emergency Action to Amend Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR,  
Re: Abalone

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Fish and Game Commission (“Commission”) as established by the Constitution of the State of California has exclusive statutory authority to manage abalone (Fish and Game Code Section 5520). Pursuant to Fish and Game Code 240, if the Commission is made aware of a situation where the immediate conservation, preservation, or protection of birds, mammals, reptiles, or fish (abalone) requires the adoption or repeal of a regulation (pursuant to Section 11346.1 of the Gov. code), it may do so after at least one hearing where such a finding can be made.

On September 9, 2011, the Commission was briefed by Department of Fish and Game (DFG) staff as to the potential impacts of an apparent large scale death of abalone along the Sonoma County coast during the last part of August 2011. The event appears to have been caused by a red tide event that produced toxins or depleted oxygen, killing a significant portion of the population.

The scope of the potential impact was not determined until after the deadline for publishing the notice for the September 2011 commission meeting. This combined with the necessity to protect the resource activates the authority for an abbreviated notice requirement under 11125.3 (a)(1) of the Gov. Code.

On September 15, 2011, the Commission determined that abalone fishery must be closed along Sonoma county to protect the sustainability of the species. The Commission has prepared this Emergency Action Statement under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) (Gov. Code, § 11340 et seq.) in connection with its subsequent amendment of section 29.15 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations.

Closing Sonoma County to the take of abalone constitutes a necessary emergency action by the Commission under the APA. In the absence of this emergency regulation, take would continue on populations that may no longer be able to sustain a fishery and could harm future recovery. The Commission finds it is imperative to protect the surviving abalone until a more thorough assessment of the impacts can be completed. This situation constitutes an emergency under Fish and Game Code section 240 and the APA requiring immediate action.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

The Department issued a press release on September 12, 2011 detailing the situation:

### **California Department of Fish and Game News Release September 12, 2011**

#### **Media Contacts:**

Ian Taniguchi, DFG Marine Region, (562) 342-7182

Kirsten Macintyre, DFG Communications, (916) 322-8988

#### **Closure of Abalone Fishery Under Consideration**

The California Fish and Game Commission will consider emergency action on Thursday, Sept. 15 to possibly close the abalone fishery along the northern California coast. This action is being considered in the wake of confirmed reports of dead red abalone and other invertebrates on beaches and inside coves along the coast in Sonoma County.

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is currently attempting to assess the impact of the situation and will provide the Commission with information at this Thursday's meeting. Based on the DFG's report, the Commission may take emergency action to close the abalone season along all or parts of the Sonoma coast.

There was an abalone die-off along the Sonoma coast beginning Aug. 27 as a result of a red tide-induced poisoning and/or lack of oxygen. According to DFG biologists, these abalone deaths coincided with a local red tide bloom and calm ocean conditions. Although the exact reasons for the abalone deaths are not known, invertebrate die-offs have occurred in the past along the northern California coast when similar weather and bloom conditions existed.

The number of dead and dying abalone is not known but DFG divers are assessing the damage this week via underwater transect surveys. Reports of dead abalone and a variety of invertebrates have come from Bodega Bay, Russian Gulch, Fort Ross, Timber Cove and Salt Point State Park. Other DFG biologists and game wardens have collected abalone, mussels and water samples since the beginning and are continuing to document reports from the public.

For more information, please refer to DFG's Sept. 2 press release, <http://cdfgnews.wordpress.com/2011/09/02/abalone-die-off-observed-in-sonoma-county/>.

Abalone fishermen are advised to contact a physician immediately if they feel sick, and to report symptoms to the local county health department ([www.sonoma-county.org/health/about/publichealth.asp](http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/about/publichealth.asp)). The latest red tide updates from the California Department of Public Health are also posted online at [www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Pages/DDWEM.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Pages/DDWEM.aspx).

### **III. FACTS CONSTITUTING THE NEED FOR EMERGENCY ACTION**

The APA defines an “emergency” to mean “a situation that calls for immediate action to avoid serious harm to the public peace, health, safety, or general welfare.” (*Id.* § 11342.545.) To make a finding of emergency, the agency must describe the specific facts supported by substantial evidence that demonstrate the existence of an emergency and the need for immediate adoption of the proposed regulation. (*Id.*, § 11346.1, subd. (b)(2).) Some of the factors an agency may consider in determining whether an emergency exists include: (1) the magnitude of the potential harm, (2) the existence of a crisis situation, (3) the immediacy of the need, i.e., whether there is a substantial likelihood that serious harm will be experienced unless immediate action is taken, and (4) whether the anticipation of harm has a basis firmer than simple speculation. DFG field surveys in recent days have provided preliminary data that show the level of mortality from this event is significant, and it is clear that fishery regulations currently in place were not anticipated to provide conservation safeguards for this unexpected increase in natural mortality. Furthermore, surviving animals may have an intrinsic resistance to the underlying cause of this mortality, and it is therefore necessary to provide additional protection at this time so that the surviving animals will have an increased opportunity to reproduce and rebuild the population.

The Commission has considered all of these factors and the definition of an emergency provided in the APA, as well as pertinent authority in Fish and Game Code section 240. Under this latter authority, notwithstanding any other provision of the Fish and Game Code, the Commission may adopt an emergency regulation where doing so is necessary for the immediate conservation, preservation, or protection of fish and wildlife resources, or for the immediate preservation of the general welfare. The Commission finds that such necessity exists in the present case.

### **IV. Express Finding of Emergency**

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Commission by Fish and Game Code section 240, and for the reasons set forth above, the Commission expressly finds that the amendment of this regulation is necessary for the immediate conservation, preservation, or protection of the abalone resource.

## **V. Authority and Reference Citations**

Authority: FGC sections 200, 202, 205, 210, 220, 240, 5521 and 7149.8.

Reference: FGC sections 200, 202, 205, 220, 240, 5521, 7145 and 7149.8.

## **VI. Informative Digest**

### Existing Laws and Regulations directly related to the proposed action

Under existing regulations (Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR), red abalone may only be taken for recreational purposes north of a line drawn due west magnetic from the center of the mouth of San Francisco Bay. Current regulations also specify: season, hours, daily limits, special gear provisions, measuring devices, abalone report card requirements, and sizes. There are no existing comparable federal regulations or statutes.

### Effect of the Regulatory Action

The proposed emergency regulations will prohibit the take of abalone along the coast of Sonoma County.

### Policy Statement Overview

DFG has confirmed a significant die-off of red abalone along the coast of Sonoma County. The cause has been determined to be an unusual red-tide event that occurred during late August and early September, 2011, although the specific mechanism that is responsible for the abalone mortality is still under investigation. Fishery regulations currently in place were not designed to provide conservation safeguards for this unexpectedly large increase in natural mortality. Furthermore, surviving abalone may have an intrinsic resistance to the underlying cause of this mortality, and it is therefore necessary to provide additional protection at this time so that the surviving animals will have an increased opportunity to reproduce and rebuild the population with potentially resistant offspring. Consequently, the Commission determined that abalone fishing must be closed along Sonoma County to protect the abalone resource.

## **VII. Specific Agency Statutory Requirements**

The Commission has complied with the special statutory requirements governing the adoption of emergency regulations pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 240. The Commission held a public hearing on this regulation on September 15, 2011, and the above finding that this regulation is necessary for the immediate conservation, preservation, or protection of fish and wildlife resources meets the requirements of section 240.

## VIII. Impact of Regulatory Action

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the emergency regulatory action has been assessed, and the following determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

(a) Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

The Commission has determined that the amendment of Section 29.15, Title 14, of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), as an emergency regulation will not result in costs or savings in federal funding to the State.

(b) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies:

The Commission has determined that amendment of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR, as an emergency regulation will not result in any costs or savings to local agencies.

(c) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts:

The Commission has determined that the amendment of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR, as an emergency regulation does not impose a mandate on local agencies or school districts.

(d) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code; and

(e) Effect on Housing Costs:

The Commission has determined that the amendment of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR as an emergency regulation will not result in any cost to any local agency or school district for which Government Code sections 17500 through 17630 require reimbursement and will not affect housing costs.

(f) Costs or Savings to State Agencies

The Commission has determined that amendment of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR as an emergency regulation will not change any cost or savings to state agencies.