

**FISH AND GAME COMMISSION  
STATEMENT OF EMERGENCY ACTION  
FOR RE-ADOPTION OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS**

Emergency Action to Re-adopt Subdivision (a) of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR,  
Re: Abalone

**I. Request for Approval of Re-adoption of Emergency Regulation**

The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) requests to re-adopt the amendment to subdivision (a) of Section 29.15, Title 14, California Code of Regulations (CCR) [Office of Administrative Law (OAL) file number 2011-0927-02 E] without modification, and to repeal the emergency changes on March 31 2012. The Findings of Emergency for this file (Attachment A), which contain the following information: Statement/Finding of Emergency; Authority and Reference Citations; Informative Digest; Fiscal Impact Statement; and Standard Form 399 are incorporated by reference.

The abalone fishery is normally open during the months of April, May, June, August, September, October and November in all areas north of a line drawn due west from the center of San Francisco Bay; however, a recent rulemaking (OAL file number 2011-1219-08S) closed the Fort Ross area to the take of abalone for the months of April and May. The objective of this re-adoption is to repeal the closure of the abalone fishery along Sonoma County before April 1, 2012, the historic opening day of the abalone fishery.

**II. Emergency Regulation in Effect to Date**

On September 15, 2011, the Commission adopted an emergency regulation to close the abalone fishery along the Sonoma County coast in response to a large scale die off of the species along the Sonoma County coast caused by an unusual red tide event. (Cal. Reg. Notice Register 2011, No. 41-Z, p. 1687 (October 14, 2011)). The emergency regulation was approved by OAL and became effective on October 4, 2011. Pursuant to Government Code (GC) sections 11346.1(e) and (h), emergency regulations are effective for 180 days. OAL may approve two re-adoptions, each for a period not to exceed ninety days. In the absence of re-adoption, the current emergency regulation will expire on April 3, 2012.

**III. Statement of Emergency**

The Commission has prepared this Emergency Action Statement under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) (Gov. Code, § 11340 et seq.) in connection with its request to OAL to approve the re-adoption of the amendment to subdivision (a) of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR. The Commission's adoption, and requested re-adoption, of subdivision (a) of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR, as an

emergency action under the APA is based, in part, on authority provided by FGC section 240.

As set forth above, the Commission found that the amendment of subdivision (a) of Section 29.15, Title 14, CCR, pursuant to FGC section 240 constituted a necessary emergency action by the Commission under the APA. However, the emergency circumstances that necessitated the amendment have ended and the Commission finds that reopening the abalone fishery on the historic opening date is appropriate.

A Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) also known as a “Red Tide” was documented along the Sonoma County coast coincident with a large die off of invertebrates in late August 2011. Most phytoplankton (microalgae) blooms are harmless but in some cases the algal species can produce toxins thus creating a HAB event. The nearshore phytoplankton bloom extended from approximately Bodega Bay north to Anchor Bay. The invertebrates affected by the bloom were reported from many taxa including mollusks (including abalone), echinoderms (i.e. sea urchins) and crustacean but fish deaths were not observed. By October the bloom had run its course and was no longer contributing to increased invertebrate mortality.

Water samples collected during the bloom revealed a number of phytoplankton species with the most abundant being the dinoflagellate, *Gonyaulax spinifera*. Standard tests for Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning and Domoic Acid biotoxins were negative during the bloom. Tests of tissue samples from dead abalone showed trace quantities of Yessotoxin, which can be produced by this *Gonyaulax* species. Little is known about the potential of this class of toxins to cause invertebrate mortality therefore other causes have not been ruled out.

Surveys of abalone and sea urchin populations conducted immediately after the HAB event along the Sonoma coast revealed significant mortality levels. Survey results were provided to Commission which lead it to approve the emergency closure of the red abalone fishery in Sonoma County for the remainder of the season (OAL File number 2011-0927-02 E).

This type of dinoflagellate has a complex life cycle with a resting cyst stage. The concern about these dormant cysts is that they may re-bloom at some time in the future when ocean conditions are optimal. A re-bloom of this toxic dinoflagellate could again cause invertebrate mortality in northern California. More work is being conducted to determine the long term impacts as well as the causes of this significant and novel abalone and sea urchin mortality event.

## **IV. Re-adoption Criteria**

### **1) Same or Substantially Equivalent**

Pursuant to GC section 11346.1(h), the text of a re-adopted regulation must be the “same or substantially equivalent” to the text of the original emergency regulation. The proposed language for the re-adopted regulatory amendment is substantially the same as the language of the original emergency regulation. A sentence will be added to the regulatory text which specifies that the special closure is in effect from October 4, 2011 through March 30, 2012, and is repealed on March 31, 2012. As the regulatory text is substantially the same as the original emergency regulation, this requirement has been met.

### **(2) Substantial Progress**

GC section 11346.1(h) specifies that the emergency rulemaking agency must demonstrate that it is making “substantial progress and has proceeded with due diligence” to comply with the standard rulemaking provisions. The Commission has not technically complied with this requirement because a standard rulemaking is not necessary in this particular circumstance. More work is being conducted to determine the long term impacts as well as the causes of the mortality event; however, the emergency circumstances that necessitated the original emergency regulation have ended and the Commission finds that reopening the abalone fishery on the historic opening date is appropriate in that the current season, minimum size limit, daily bag limit and yearly trip limit are sufficient to maintain a sustainable fishery.