

Department of Fish and Wildlife Review of
Commercial Dungeness Crab Landings Trends and Recent Recreational
Catch Trends in Central California Coastal Counties
July 2015

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has reviewed Dungeness crab landings data for the commercial fleet in Central California coastal counties over the past 20 years, and reviewed recent recreational catch estimates from this region.

The Department has maintained records of seasonal commercial catch for over 100 years. Historically, catches have been cyclical but, despite wide fluctuations in catch on decadal time scales, the commercial fishery appears sustainable under the current management scheme in that no long term crashes have been observed over this time period. During the past ten seasons (from 2004-05 to 2013-14), average commercial Dungeness crab landings were 7.9 million pounds from Sonoma County south. This represents a more than threefold increase from the previous ten seasons (1994-95 to 2003-04), where average landings were 2.6 million pounds.

Data for the recreational fishery is much more limited. Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) catch data are derived from catch reported by CPFVs on their daily logs, and no estimates of catch from anglers aboard private vessels or who fish from shore are available. Recently, the California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS) effort was used to estimate recreational Dungeness crab catch at the start of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 fishing season for the geographical portion of the fishery in CRFS District 4 (Sonoma, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties) during the month of November (2013 and 2014), which is the month of highest angler effort. These preliminary catch estimates accounted for about 2-3% of the total combined recreational and commercial catch for the area during the same time period, and catch from CPFVs was <1% of the total combined catch for both November 2013 and 2014. Although the recreational data does not include catch from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, the increasing trend in commercial landings and the small proportion of recreational catch compared to these landings suggests that a similar trend would apply if estimates were added for Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Therefore, the Department concludes that the proposed increase in CPFV bag limit from 6 to 10 crab, and reduction in minimum size limit from 6 inches to 5.75 inches in Central California coastal counties (from Sonoma to Monterey counties), would be unlikely to significantly alter catch patterns between sectors of the fishery in this area.