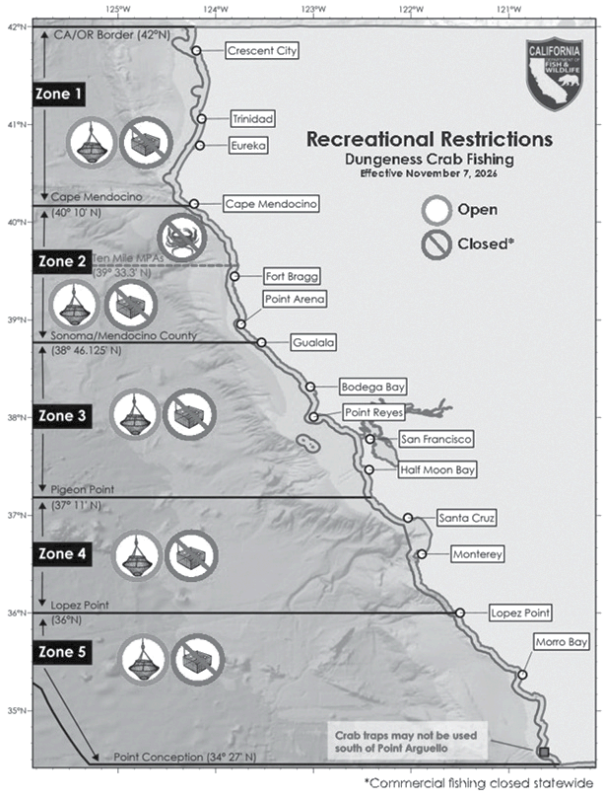
Del Norte Triplicate

NEWS

Recreational Dungeness Crab Fishing Begins in Most Areas Nov. 7 with Trap Restrictions, Commercial Season Delayed

By California Department of Fish and Wildlife News Release November 5, 2026



Pictured is the 2025-26 Recreational Dungeness Crab Season Map highlighting restricted areas.

CALIFORNIA (MPG) - The recreational Dungeness crab season will open under trap restrictions beginning Nov. except in a portion of Northern California where it has been delayed due to a public health hazard.

State health agencies determined that Dungeness crab collected north of Fort Bragg (southern Humboldt County/northern Mendocino County) have unhealthy levels of domoic acid and recommended delaying the opening of the recreational fishery in state waters from Cape Mendocino (40° 10' N latitude) to the Ten Mile State Marine Reserve (39° 33.3' N latitude). Following this recommendation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director Meghan Hertel has delayed the opening of the recreational Dungeness crab season in this area. Recreational take and/or possession of Dungeness crab is prohibited in these closed waters.

The use of recreational crab traps will be restricted (PDF)(external link) from the California/Oregon border to Point Conception (34° 27' N latitude, Fishing Zones 1-5) until at least Jan. 1, 2027, due to the number of confirmed entanglements this year and high abundance of humpback whales across the fishing grounds. A Fleet Advisory has also been issued for all Fishing Zones for the recreational fishery and crabbers should avoid setting any gear in areas where whales are present. The trap restriction does not affect the use of hoop nets and crab snares (loop traps), and CDFW reminds anglers that all hoop nets must be serviced every two hours and cannot be left unattended for longer periods.

The commercial Dungeness crab fishery will be delayed from the California/Oregon border to Point Conception until at least Jan. 1, 2027. The commercial season delay and recreational trap restriction is required due to the number of humpback whale entanglements during the 2026 calendar year. Current regulations require the CDFW director to take these actions to reduce the possibility of additional entanglements for the remainder of the year. This delay will also allow whales to migrate out of California waters prior to the opening of the commercial fishery.

“CDFW remains committed to working collaboratively with all sectors across California to protect whale and turtles from entanglements in fishing gear,” Hertel said. “Partnerships are more important than ever as we work together to protect endangered whales and turtles and our fishing communities in the face of increasing disruptions from our changing climate.”

CDFW anticipates the next risk assessment will take place in mid-December to inform a possible opening of the commercial fishery and lifting of the recreational crab trap restrictions around the new year. During the mid-December Risk Assessment, the CDFW’s director will evaluate all available data, including a recommendation from the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group to determine when the commercial fishery can open and recreational trap restrictions can be lifted.

The delay of the portion of the recreational fishery in southern Humboldt County/northern Mendocino County shall remain in effect until the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, in consultation with the State Public Health Officer at the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), determines that domoic acid no longer poses a significant public health risk.

Domoic acid is a potent neurotoxin produced by Pseudo-nitzschia, a naturally occurring single-celled, marine alga under certain ocean conditions. Domoic acid can accumulate in shellfish, other invertebrates and sometimes fish without the organism becoming ill themselves. At low levels, domoic acid exposure can cause nausea, diarrhea and dizziness in humans. At higher levels, it can cause persistent short-term memory loss, seizures and can in some cases be fatal.

For more information related to the risk assessment process, visit CDFW’s Whale Safe Fisheries page. For more information on the Dungeness crab fishery, visit www.wildlife.ca.gov/crab.