Background

The recreational abalone fishery is currently managed under the FGC-adopted Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP). Since February 2016, DFW abalone project staff has kept FGC and MRC updated on impacts to abalone stocks resulting from the unprecedented set of environmental conditions and subsequent biological impacts to abalone, which warranted emergency action by FGC in December, 2016. Severely-impacted environmental and red abalone conditions led FGC to take emergency action to change abalone regulations in 2017 by reducing the annual limit from 18 to 12 (except for Sonoma County, which remained at 9) and reducing the months open to fishing from seven to five by closing April and November. The emergency regulations became effective on April 1, 2017 and will expire on September 29, 2017.

In June 2017, DFW also notified FGC that regulations to be proposed for the 2018 fishery season may need to be more restrictive than the 2017 emergency regulations. DFW reported that early indications, based on recent DFW creel surveys and in-water reports and observations to date, suggest conditions continue to be very poor and are not likely to quickly improve. Red abalone assessed from nine sites in 2017 shows that 25% of the abalone surveyed are shrunken and starving. Kelp food resources continue to be poor and density of purple sea urchin competitors remains high. There is also growing concern amongst DFW staff that this summer's density survey results may hit management triggers specified in the ARMP, resulting in additional restrictions, including possible site or county closures.

Concerns for abalone:

Continuing starvation conditions

- Food scarce
- High densities of purple sea urchins
- Reproduction conditions very poor

Abalone fishery more vulnerable

- Abalone are all in shallow water
- Harvesting has never been better

2017 rulemaking schedule:

Rulemaking August, 2017

- Extend present emergency rules
- Consider more restrictive options:
  - Annual limit of 9
  - Closure(s)