

# Fish and Game Commission, Department of Fish and Wildlife are *NOT* considering a fishing closure

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The state is not considering a statewide fishing closure.

The Fish and Game Commission (FGC) had an emergency meeting Thursday to decide whether or not to give the director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) the authority to delay or close fishing seasons statewide due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Yes, that is what the FGC material said. Anglers heard: Close fishing statewide.

Due to technical difficulties and an unruly crowd that had logged in to comment during the remote meeting, the session was postponed and rescheduled to Wednesday, April 15.

The Commission had already determined that “a temporary, adaptive approach is needed to give DFW the ability to delay, suspend or restricts port fishing in certain or all inland and marine waters,” according to the meeting package made available to the public.

But the DFW and FGC did not make one important thing clear: They were not contemplating closing the state to fishing.

The emergency regulation would give the DFW the authority to do this “when necessary to protect public health from the threat posed due to by COVID-19. The decisions under this emergency regulation will be based on the most current information available, considering public health and safety guidance from federal, state, tribal, and local officials, and in consultation with the president of FGC.”

That’s a lot of blah-blah-blah and sounds like fishing seasons might be closed statewide.

As background, the Commission and DFW had received formal requests from a number of local governments, businesses, and organizations in areas throughout the state to delay the trout season opener (April 25) so there were not influxes of people from outside of small communities in recreational areas. The concern was the spread of COVID-19 where increased infections of local residents could tax the local medical facilities in these rural areas.

Both Inyo and Mono counties had asked for a delay in the trout season, in spite of the financial hardship such a delay would have on local businesses.

It was not about closing fishing statewide. (At least for now.) Many anglers didn’t bother to read the information posted on line about on the emergency meeting and simply heard “close down fishing.” They had heard the state of Washington stupidly closed all fishing and figured California didn’t want to be outdone by our northern neighbors.

Then the electronic meeting devolved into a chaos.

The system the FGC was using to have its remote meeting and hear public comment was overwhelmed by the volume of callers. Two of the FGC Commissioners were unable to log on to the system, as were hundreds of anglers trying to access the meeting. Things went downhill from there, with callers sounding more like a mob when it looked like the meeting was going to be cancelled and that there were not controls to restrict those who wanted to speak.

The *Sacramento Bee* posted an audio of about three minutes of the meeting that was almost comical.

After the meeting was cancelled, a joint statement was put out after the meeting from Eic Sklar, FGC President, and Chuck

Bonham, director of the DFW, in attempt to quell some anglers misconceptions about what was taking place. In typical government fashion, they buried the lead:

“We... want to make it crystal clear that today’s proposed decision was not about banning fishing statewide or locally. We are not contemplating statewide closure.”

This was in the third paragraph of their statement and many anglers would not have made it this far after reading the gobbledegook before and after those two critical sentences.

What is it with politicians?

Why do they have to write and say things like: “The decision is to help prepare us to work with counties and tribes to make those decisions based on their requests. We are working on a tailored and surgical approach based on local needs and knowledge. We have already received some of these requests. Today’s proposed action was an effort to become more nimble and ready to react when asked by a local entity to act.”

Surgical approach?

Far from it. If the people in charge of the DFW and FGC can’t write a surgical, to-the-point statement about what is taking place, can we trust their decisions on resources and recreation?

We all know the answer to that question.

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