

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON MODIFICATIONS TO ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) offers the following comments for Council consideration in developing its preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) for essential fish habitat (EFH). CDFW would like to express our gratitude for all the hard work that went into developing thoughtful alternatives which attempt to balance habitat protection and fishing opportunity. However, substantial work remains before further refinement in certain geographic regions is possible. At this time CDFW has yet to identify a complete PPA but would like to provide some specific recommendations on the Oceana¹ proposal regarding the proposed closures in the southern California bight.

The Oceana proposal to close waters in the southern California bight, as we understand it, would be somewhat analogous to the action supported by CDFW in 2005 to freeze the trawl footprint south at Point Conception at 300 fm ([Agenda Item C.3.b, Supplemental CDFG Report, June 2005](#)). At that time, the 300 fm isobaths included nearly all recent trawl tracks and left some “unfished” areas within that zone to allow for fishery flexibility while closing all areas in deeper waters to protect habitats from future expansion of trawl fishing. Based on discussions with Oceana, CDFW understands that their proposed closure in southern California has a similar goal of freezing the footprint, and is not intended to affect areas utilized by state-managed trawl fisheries (i.e., California halibut, ridgeback prawn, sea cucumber trawl, and pink shrimp).

CDFW examined state trawl log data for California halibut, ridgeback prawn, sea cucumber, and pink shrimp fisheries from 2010-2016 to evaluate the effects of the Oceana proposal on recent trawl activities (Fig. 1). It is important to note these data are incomplete and not available for all years throughout the time period. Logbooks are required by state law for each of these fisheries. Based on these trawl data, CDFW identified three areas near Ventura, the Los Angeles Harbor, and Oceanside where the Oceana proposal overlapped with these current state-managed fisheries (assuming the trawl RCA is removed).

Figures 2 and 3 provide CDFW’s proposed modifications to the Oceana proposal in those areas where an overlap was identified. The result of the CDFW modifications would be to use waypoints defined in federal regulation that approximate the 100 fm depth contour as the EFH boundary in these areas.

¹ [Agenda Item B.1.b, Supplemental Public Comment 7, June 2016](#)

An evaluation of landings by CDFW block from 2006 through 2015 indicates that the ridgeback prawn and sea cucumber are encountered across a fairly wide area within the southern California bight (Figures 4 and 5). While there can be some uncertainty in the reliability of block data to accurately record fishing location, it does highlight the need to garner additional input from the public on the location of current and historical fishing activities to help inform the effects of the Oceana proposal.

With the inclusion of the proposed modifications, CDFW tentatively supports Oceana's proposal south of Point Conception, but notes that additional stakeholder review and input and analysis of other data sources would be beneficial prior to taking final action.

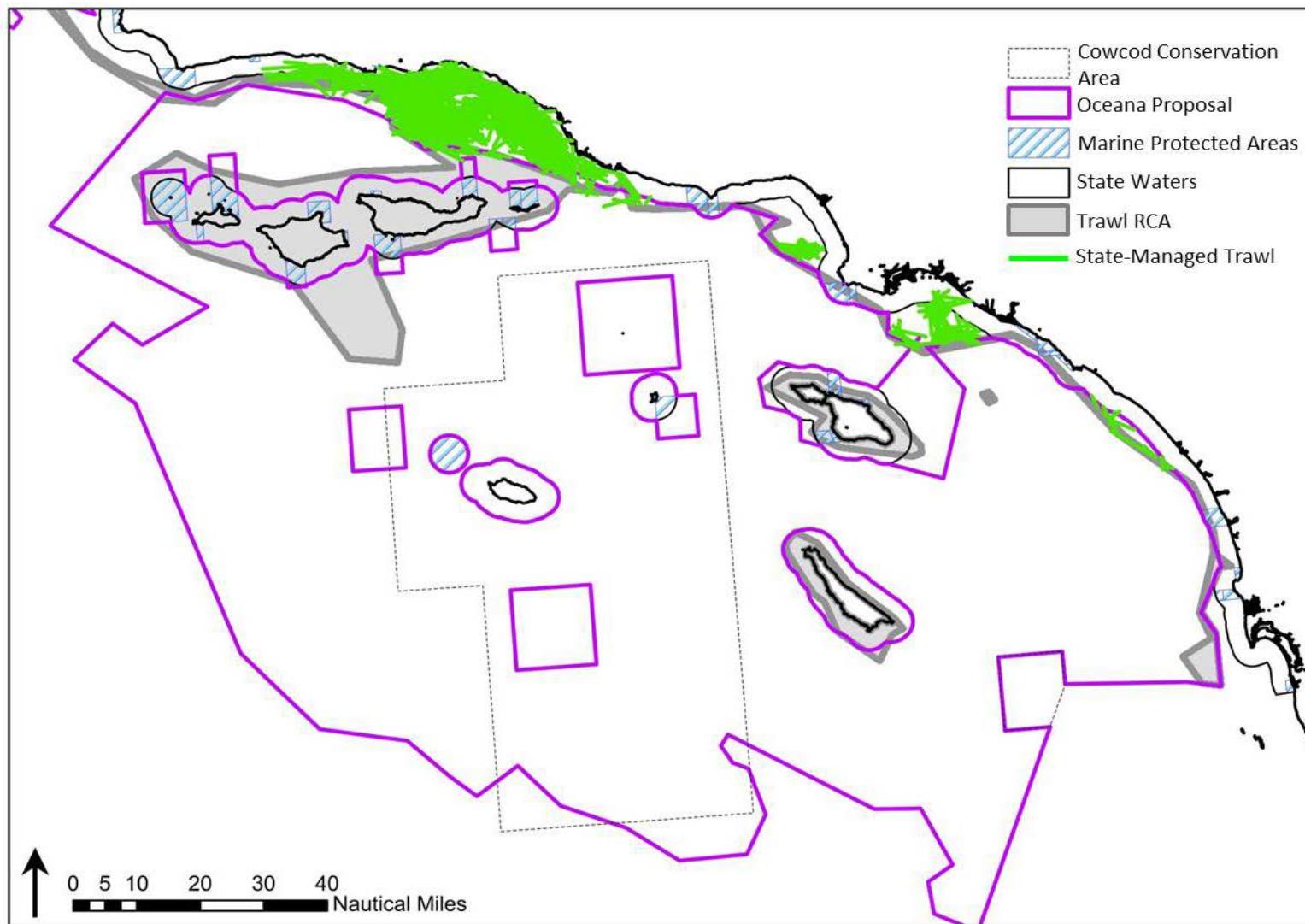


Figure 1. Summary of aggregate state-managed trawl logbook data (trawl track lines) in the southern California bight. Data are preliminary and includes California halibut and sea cucumber fishery data from 2010-2016. For ridgeback prawn and pink shrimp fisheries, only 2015 data are included.

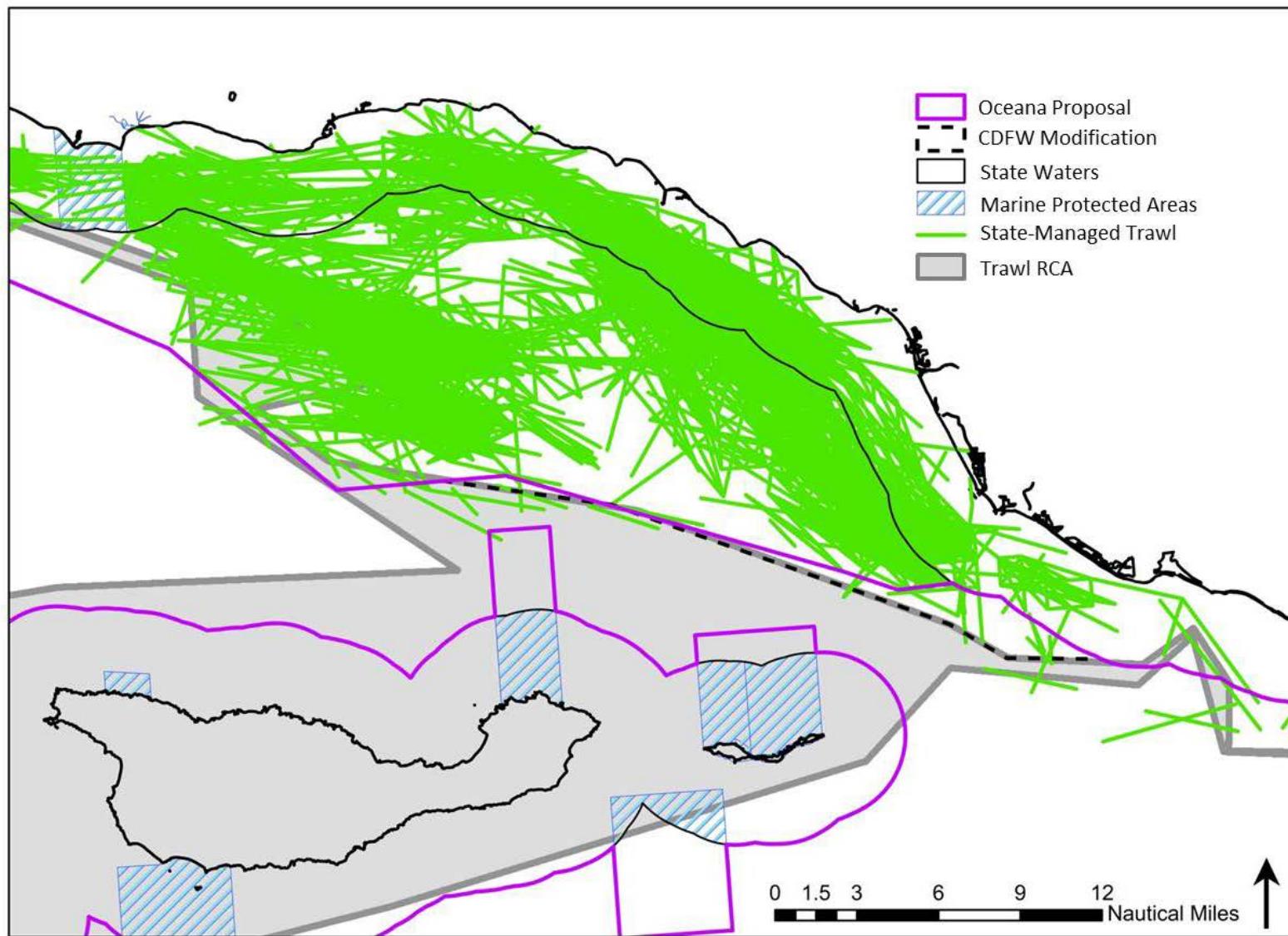


Figure 2. CDFW proposed modification to the Oceana proposal near Ventura.

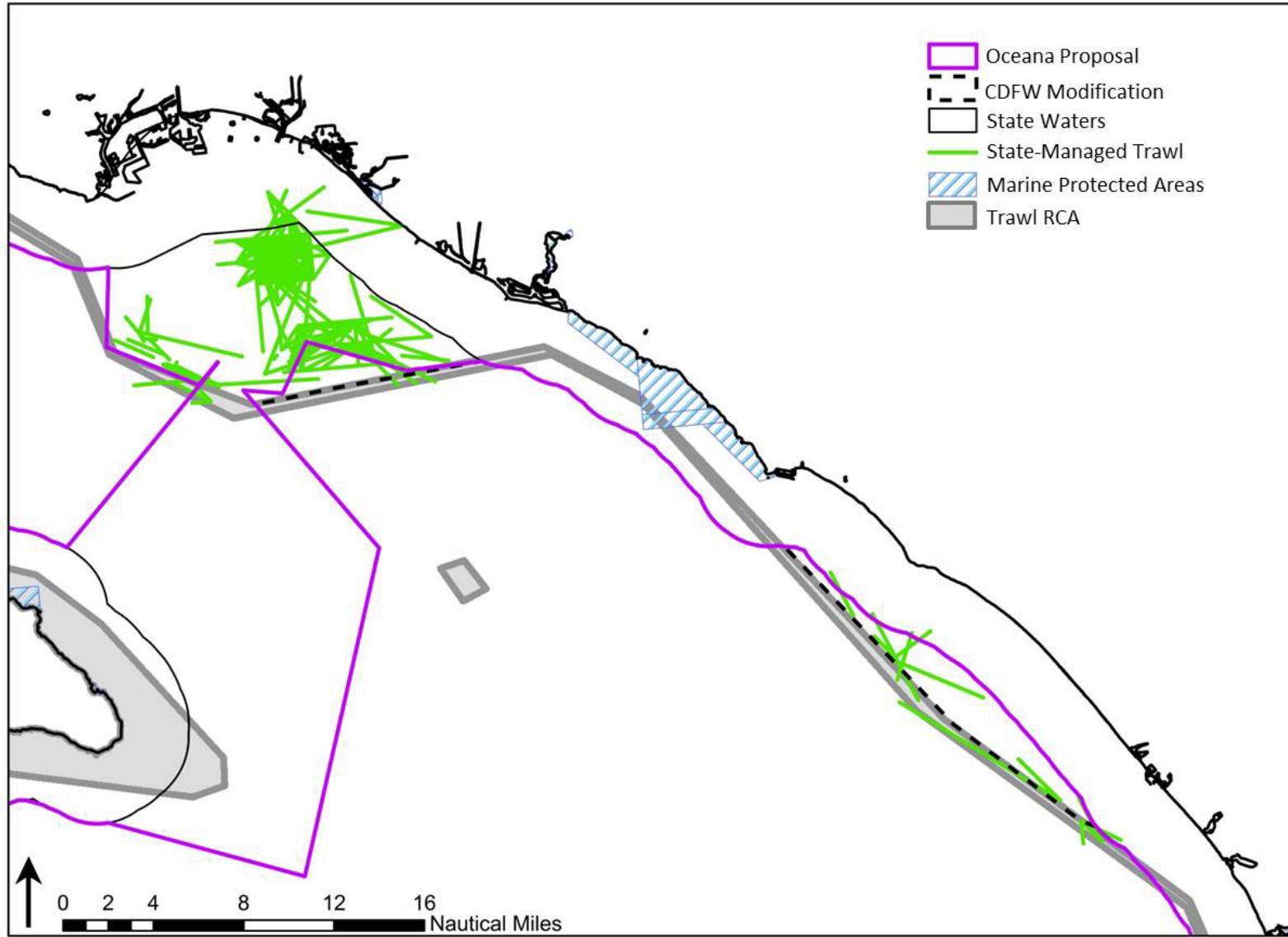


Figure 3. CDFW proposed modification to the Oceana proposal near Los Angeles harbor/Newport and Dana Point/Oceanside.

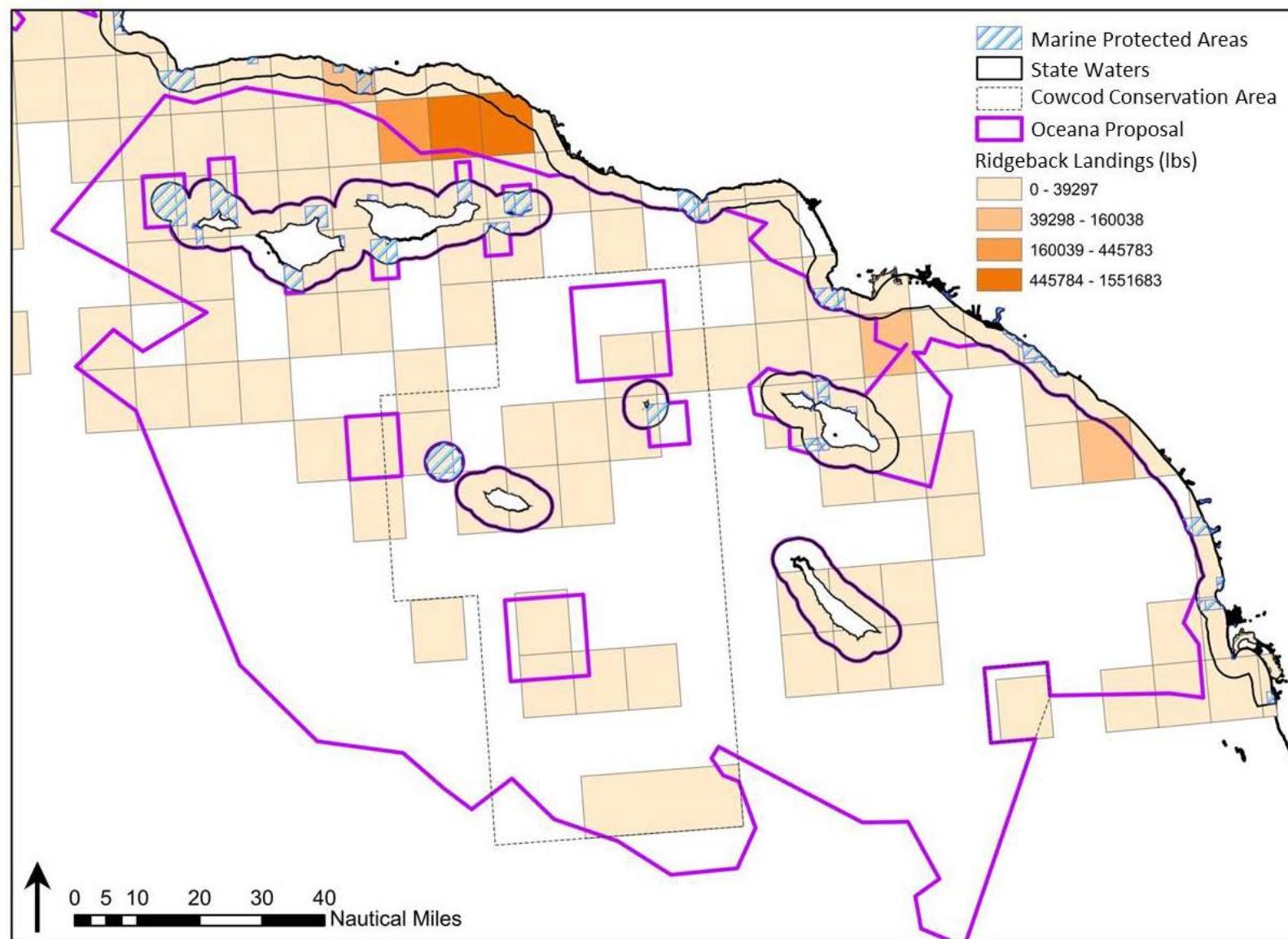


Figure 4. Ridgeback prawn landings by CDFW block as reported on state fish tickets from 2006 through 2015.

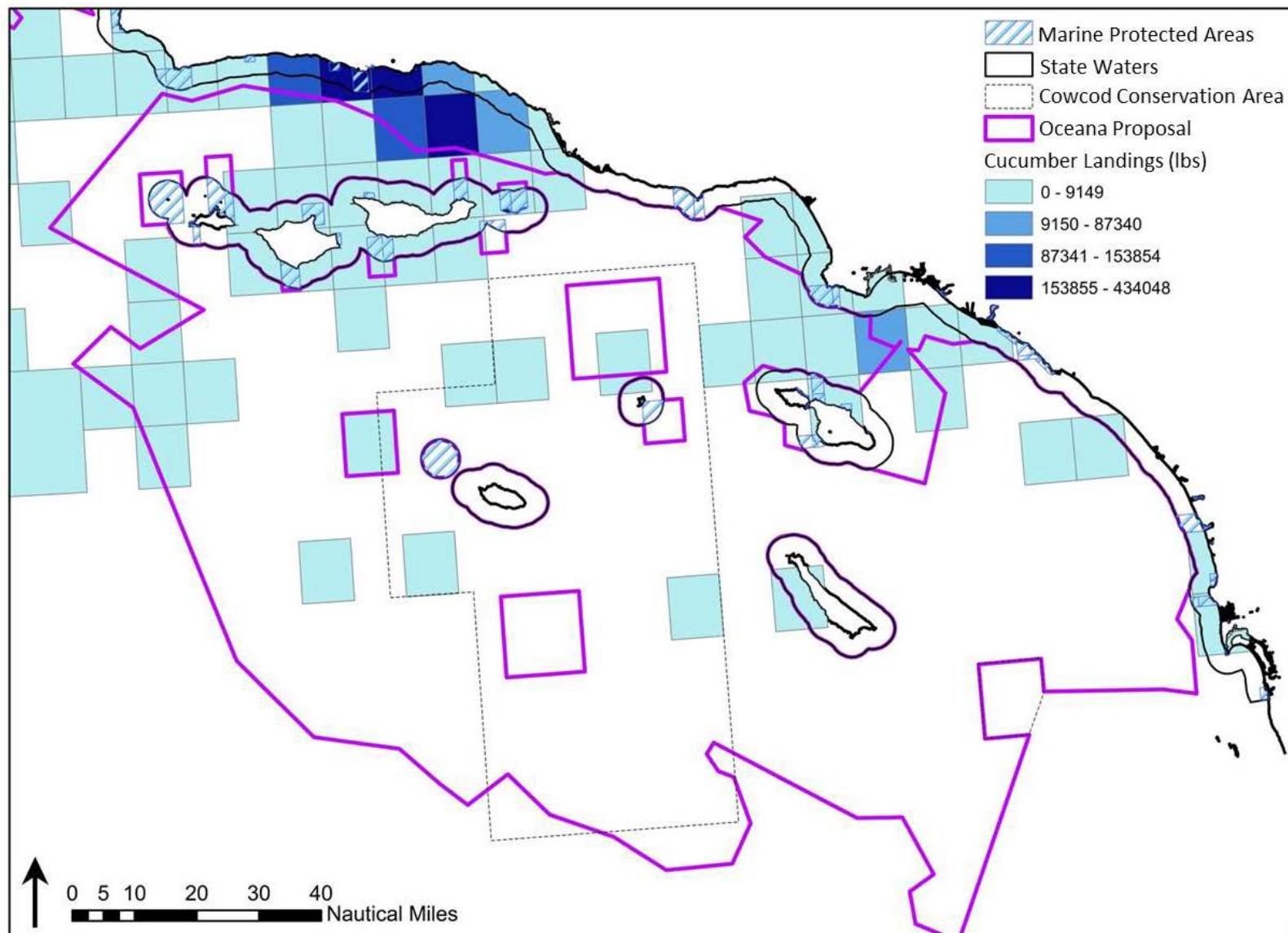


Figure 5. Sea cucumber landings by CDFW block as reported on state fish tickets for 2006 through 2015.