

CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

June 5, 2018 Convenings

Rate of Whale Entanglements at Moderate Risk

2017-18 Whale Entanglement Risk Assessment & Mitigation Program (RAMP) Pilot

On June 5, 2018, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Ocean Protection Council, convened the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) to discuss elevated numbers of entanglements observed in May 2018, as well as review other risk assessment factors including whale concentrations, forage/ocean conditions, and fishing dynamics. The Working Group reviewed the available information and the following risk level was identified:

- Entanglements: **Moderate**
- Whale concentrations: **Moderate**
- Forage/ocean conditions: **Moderate**
- Fishing dynamics: **Low**

More information about the scoring of each factor is available [here](#) (see “Summary” section below for additional details). As we look ahead to the final weeks of the 2017-18 fishing season, migrating whales are expected to be present in high numbers in traditional Dungeness crab fishing ground throughout California.

Those who are no longer fishing are strongly encouraged to remove all fishing gear that is not being actively fished. The Working Group recommends fishermen avoid fishing in areas where there are groups of feeding or migrating whales, schools of anchovy, and/or swarms of krill and proceed with caution in the vicinity of submarine canyons, and if possible, consider reducing the number of traps that are being actively fished. All Dungeness crab traps need to be removed by the close of the fishing season south of the Sonoma/Mendocino county line on June 30 and north of the Sonoma/Mendocino county line on July 15.

To minimize the potential for whale entanglements, the commercial fleet and recreational fishing community are requested to follow the recommendations outlined in the [2017-18 Best Practices Guide](#), with specific attention to the setup of surface gear. Fishermen, particularly those fishing in the Northern Management Area, are encouraged to share observations of whale activity and ocean conditions (e.g., are you seeing schools of anchovy, and if so, where?) to help inform the Working Group’s efforts. Text 310-738-2665 or email info@cawhalegroup.com.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Working Group advisors will continue to work collaboratively and monitor any changes in risk throughout the 2017-18 fishing season. In collaboration with agencies and researchers, the Working Group will continue to evaluate, and be responsive to the relative risk of entanglements and will inform the industry as new updates are available. Additionally, CDFW will be releasing a press release to inform all fixed gear fisheries of these voluntary recommendations.

This update will be shared via the [DCTF email list](#), the [Working Group webpage](#), and [CDFW’s crab webpage](#). The Working Group welcomes your feedback and insights about the Working Group’s efforts and the 2017-18 RAMP pilot. Please visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group> or contact the Working Group at info@cawhalegroup.com.

Summary

In May 2018, there were seven (7) confirmed entanglement reports in California involving five (5) confirmed humpback whales, one grey whale, and one fin whale. Most of the gear involved in the entanglements is unidentified, with one report involving CA Dungeness crab gear that was set in the Crescent City area. Entanglements have been observed from the CA/OR border to Ventura. There have also been three (3) confirmed entanglement reports in Washington.

In addition to this recent uptick in whale entanglements, it was reported that concentrations of whales migrating along the West Coast continue to increase, as expected for this time of year. Upwelling has continued resulting in a very good krill year, particularly around the shelf and canyon areas. Anchovy populations are showing up in some concentrated areas in high numbers along the coast. While patchy in distribution, this could bring humpbacks closer inshore, putting them at increased risk of entanglements. While fishing effort continues to decrease, it was reported that a fair price is still holding and some fishermen plan to fish until the end of the season.