

# CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

October 26 & November 6, 2017 Convenings

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## Whale Concentrations at Moderate Risk

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

The California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) convened on October 26 and November 6, 2017, to discuss the relative risk of whale entanglements as the 2017-18 California Dungeness crab fishing season approaches. Four priority factors—season delay, forage/ocean conditions, whale concentrations, and rate of entanglements—were evaluated and a preseason risk level was identified for each:

- Whale concentrations: **Moderate**
- Entanglements: **Low**
- Forage/ocean conditions: **Low**
- Season delay: **Low**

More information about the scoring of each factor is available ([here](#)) and additional information about the reason for the “moderate” whale concentration score is detailed below.

### *Whale Concentrations, Moderate*

As of November 3, 2017, the 7-day composite running average of whale sightings in the Monterey Bay area (used to track humpback whales’ seasonal migration and anticipated departure from California feeding grounds) is between 5 to 20 whales. For the 2017-18 RAMP pilot, the Working Group identified this average concentration as “moderate”, suggesting that humpback whales have not moved off their traditional feeding grounds as of early November.

As a next step, the Working Group (operating as an evaluation team) has initiated a data gathering exercise to continue the compilation and analysis of available data on whale concentrations (data sources include Monterey Bay Whale Watch, the Applied California Current Ecosystem Studies (ACCESS), and Oceanic Society). Additionally, an aerial survey will be conducted in the Southern Management Area by Working Group science advisors in the first few weeks following the opener (weather dependent). Efforts are being made to consider relationships between whale concentration information and the other priority factors.

**To minimize the potential for whale entanglements in the 2017-18 Dungeness crab fishing season, the commercial fleet and recreational fishing community are requested to consult and follow the recommendations outlined in the [2017-18 Best Practices Guide](#), with specific attention to the setup of surface gear. Fishermen should be on alert and avoid fishing in areas where there are groups of feeding whales and/or schools of anchovy.**

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and Working Group advisors will collaboratively track these factors and watch for any changes in risk throughout the 2017-18 fishing season. The Working Group will continue to work with agencies and researchers to evaluate, and be responsive to, the relative risk of entanglements. Unless there are additional indications of elevated risk identified in the near-term, group is scheduled to reconvene in early March to conduct a mid-season risk assessment.

Additional updates on the status of whale concentrations, along with updates on the other three factors, will be shared via the [DCTF email list](#), the [Working Group webpage](#), and [CDFW’s Dungeness crab webpage](#). For more information about the Working Group’s efforts and the 2017-18 RAMP pilot, including opportunities to provide feedback and share your expertise, visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group> or contact the Working Group at [info@cawhalegroup.com](mailto:info@cawhalegroup.com).

