

CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

January 11, 2019 Convenings

Entanglement Risk Low to Moderate in Northern Management Area 2018-19 Whale Entanglement Risk Assessment & Mitigation Program (RAMP)

On January 11, 2019, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the Ocean Protection Council*, convened the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group)’s Evaluation Team to proactively discuss and assess the relative risk of entanglements in advance of the January 15, 2019 Northern Management Area partial opener (see [here](#) for more details). Due to the Federal government shutdown and other circumstances, the Working Group had limited participation from federal partners, and access to information across the four risk factors. The following risk levels were identified for humpback and blue whales:

Humpback Whales**			
Central Management Area (south of the Mendocino/Sonoma County line)		Northern Management Area (partial) (area south of Patrick’s Point, Humboldt County to the Sonoma/Mendocino county line)	
Risk Factors	Low/Moderate/High	Risk Factors	Low/Moderate/High
Entanglements Whale concentrations Forage/ocean conditions Fishing dynamics	LOW	Entanglements Whale concentrations Forage/ocean conditions Fishing dynamics	LOW to MODERATE

Blue Whales**			
Central Management Area (south of the Mendocino/Sonoma County line)		Northern Management Area (partial) (area south of Patrick’s Point, Humboldt County to the Sonoma/Mendocino county line)	
Risk Factors	Relative Risk Level	Risk Factors	Relative Risk Level
Rate of entanglements Whale concentrations Forage/ocean conditions Fishing dynamics	LOW	Rate of entanglements Whale concentrations Forage/ocean conditions Fishing dynamics	LOW

More information and rationale for the scoring of each factor is [available here](#) (see “Summary” section below for additional details). In summary, the delayed northern opener increases the potential for high concentrations of fishing gear in areas where migrating and feeding whales may be present. **To minimize the potential for whale entanglements, the commercial fleet and recreational fishing community are requested to follow the recommendations outlined in the [2018-19 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 or swarms of krill.**

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, what

depth contour?) to help inform the Working Group's efforts. Text 310-738-2665 or email info@cawhalegroup.com.

The Working Group anticipates changes in the distribution and concentrations of whales, particularly in the Central Management Area as we head into the spring months, and all risk factors will continue to be monitored closely and responded to as needed. Fishermen are encouraged to fish as minimal gear as possible and must remove any gear that cannot be serviced every 96 hours (at minimum).

In collaboration with agencies and researchers, the Working Group will continue to inform the industry as new updates are available. The Working Group will meet in mid-February to re-evaluate entanglement risk looking ahead to the spring fishing season unless the agencies identify a need to meet sooner.

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 2018-19 RAMP. Please visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group> or contact the Working Group at info@cawhalegroup.com.

*The January 11, 2019 Evaluation Team call involved limited participation from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries staff due to the partial Federal government shutdown.

** The Working Group developed the following risk assessment based on limited information, particularly for the whale concentrations and forage/ocean conditions factors. Additional evaluation of these factors will be conducted once resources and personnel are in place to help review available data and provide an expert assessment.

Summary

In November and December of 2018, there were three (3) confirmed entanglement reports and one (1) unconfirmed in California. Of the three confirmed, two (2) entanglements were confirmed as humpback whales and involved unidentified fishing gear, and the other confirmed entanglement involved CA commercial Dungeness crab gear, however, the whale species was unidentified. During the January 11 call, the National Marine Fisheries Service provided preliminary entanglement numbers for 2018 in CA (36 reports, 27 confirmed) and on the West Coast (CA, OR, WA) (56 reports, 43 confirmed). The Working Group highlighted the importance of considering the cumulative number of 2018 entanglements, particularly those occurring in May-August, during this evaluation and the mid-season risk assessment scheduled for February.

Limited whale concentration and forage/ocean condition information was available to help inform Working Group discussions. A recent El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) report indicates that despite the above-average ocean temperatures across the equatorial Pacific Ocean, the overall coupled ocean-atmosphere system continued to reflect ENSO-neutral ([here](#)). Mixed observations were provided by fishermen and whale watch operators on the concentration and distribution of forage, with anchovies reported in the shipping lanes from Bodega Head to Point Pinos, as well as south of Point Pinos to Cypress Point. Observed concentrations of humpback whales in the Central Management Area by both whale watch operators and fishermen appear to be low compared to this time last year. Blue whales have migrated south and have not been observed in the Central Management Area. Price for crab has decreased since the opening of the Central Management Area and is not expected to rise due to the multiple openers anticipated in the north. Fishermen reported the northern opener(s) are not expected to result in high gear concentrations in those areas, and gear concentrations will decrease within 2-3 weeks after the opener. Fishing in the Central Management Area was observed to be decreasing due to the low price and crabs beginning to clutch. Based on the information available, the Evaluation Team assessed the risk in the Central Management Area as low and the as low to moderate in the Northern Management Area.