

ANNOUNCEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE USE

May 26, 2016

The following statement was developed by participants of the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group. For more information contact Kelly Sayce (310-738-2665) or Rachele Fisher (805-845-9852), or email info@strategicearth.com.*

On May 24, 2016, after consulting with NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Protected Resources Division, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) issued a [letter to California Dungeness crab fishermen](#) advising voluntary actions to reduce whale entanglements in fishing gear. Participants of the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group also contributed to, and strongly supports, the recommendations issued by CDFW. These recommendations provided by CDFW were also informed by local fishermen from the Monterey Bay area and have the support of the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

The Working Group, which convened in 2015 in response to an increase in whale entanglements, is comprised of commercial and recreational crab fishermen from throughout the state; conservation organizations Oceana, Earthjustice, Center for Biological Diversity, and The Nature Conservancy; the U.S. Coast Guard, National Marine Fisheries Service, and CDFW. Fishermen and conservation groups from the Working Group are hopeful the recommendations will result in actions that reduce whale entanglement risk for the remainder of the 2015-16 commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fishing seasons. The Working Group will reconvene this summer to continue developing recommendations for short- and long-term solutions to reduce whale entanglements in fishing gear.

Bob Maharry, commercial crab fisherman from Morro Bay and Working Group participant stated, "The recommendations provided by the Department of Fish and Wildlife are a bold and positive step forward. Even though whale populations have increased tremendously over recent years, entanglements are a problem. As a crab fisherman, I support taking steps to help solve this issue."

Geoff Shester, a Working Group participant representing the conservation organization Oceana, stated, "The recommendations in the letter are a meaningful step toward preventing whale entanglements in the near term while maintaining valuable California fisheries. We hope to continue collaborative efforts through the Working Group to develop long-term solutions."

The recommendations are as follows:

- Fishermen should remove gear, and avoid setting gear, in areas where humpback whales are likely to be feeding or aggregating such as near the shelf edges and canyons where krill and fish are expected to be abundant, giving humpback whales some foraging space free of gear in those areas that are known or expected to be productive for their prey.

** The Working Group arrives at all products and recommendations through a consensus-based process. This statement was supported by 13 of the 14 Working Group participants.*

- Fishermen should consider minimizing the use or profile of trailer buoys. Trailer buoy lines are commonly part of the gear that ends up entangled on animals. Recognizing that trailer buoys are used for very specific and important reasons, we recommend that fishermen consider working to improve the trailer buoy system/concept so it meets their needs, but reduces the extent of the line profile in the water.
- Fishermen should work cooperatively to reduce the amount of gear currently set in the Monterey Bay area. The relative level of fishing effort (in terms of the number of traps being set – and as reflected by landings data) has been significantly higher throughout a large portion of the southern part of the Dungeness crab fishery since 2014. This period coincides directly with an increase in the number of reports of entangled whales.
- The fleet should implement best practices in the configuration and deployment of gear and participate in the many efforts of the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group to develop long-term solutions to this problem per the [Best Practices Guide](#) that was developed by the working group.

Over the last few years, and currently again in 2016, reports of entangled whales (mostly humpback whales) are occurring at very high rates. The unfortunate delay in the opening of the Dungeness crab fishery this year due to domoic acid has likely resulted in a greater concentration of crab traps later in the season and at a time when ocean waters off the central coast are a hotspot for humpback whales in particular.

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