

The following summary document was developed in Spring 2018 following the Working Group's midseason risk evaluation. The Working Group identified a missed opportunity to communicate the results of the December 8, 2017 aerial survey, which helped to inform the Working Group to change the whale concentration factor scoring from moderate to low.

The information provided is intended to help complete the RAMP pilot and become part of the Working Group's accounting of all activities that took place during the 2017-18 fishing season. For more information, visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group> or contact the Working Group at info@cawhalegroup.com.

California Whale Entanglement Working Group Risk Assessment Framework - Aerial Survey and Risk Factor Update December 2017

Status Update: 2017-18 Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) Pilot

The California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) convened on November 30, 2017 to assess the relative risk of whale entanglements at the outset of the 2017-18 California Dungeness crab fishing season ([here](#)). At the time of that discussion, the Working Group were informed that there were high concentrations of humpback and blue whales being observed by whale watch operators, particularly off of Monterey Canyon and the Gulf of the Farallones. At the same time, fishermen on the Working Group (as well as other non-Working Group fishermen) were not seeing high numbers of whales on the water. In response, the Working Group coordinated additional information gathering efforts to better understand, monitor, and potentially respond to the issue.

One of the primary information gathering methods used was an aerial survey that was conducted in the Central Management Area. A full summary report of the aerial survey findings is available [here](#). The survey revealed a few patterns of potential relevance to the RAMP:

- Crab pot gear densities were greatest north of the Golden Gate and lowest in Monterey Bay. Within Monterey Bay, there appeared to be less gear than during a similar June 2016 aerial survey, even after taking into account the higher winds and less favorable viewing conditions during the Dec 8 flight.
- Humpback whales were documented in groups of 1-3 animals in both shallow and deeper waters from Monterey Bay to Half Moon Bay. Sighting locations included areas without nearby pot gear and areas of low-to-moderate gear densities.
- Two pairs of blue whales were seen (in one case feeding on krill) in water depths of about 200-m (109-fm), and crab pots were observed near both sightings.
- Although most gear was marked by two typical crab pot buoys, a variety of other buoy configurations were observed, including surface gear with one, two, three or four buoys, and buoys of varying sizes and colors.
- Crab pot gear extended out the offshore end of some of the transect lines, suggesting that any future surveys might need to include areas beyond 150-m (82-fm) water depth, particularly because whales are commonly found there.

Based on the survey's findings that there was minimal overlap of whales and fishing activity, coupled with ongoing observations by fishermen and whale watch operators, the agencies did not have immediate cause for concern and recommended to the Working Group that the whale concentration factor should remain at **moderate** until the Working Group reconvened in January 2018 to revisit and evaluate the risk factors.