



Industry-Led Crab Gear Retrieval Program

To reduce the risk of whale entanglements, commercial Dungeness crab fishermen in Half Moon Bay have teamed up with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to create a pilot program to recover lost crab fishing gear in an efficient and effective manner. In its first year of implementation, this fishermen-led program was highly successful and provides important lessons for controlling costs and improving efficiency of these projects as they expand up and down the coast.

California Commercial Crab Fishery and Recent Areas of Concern

The California Dungeness crab fishery is a highly valuable state resource, averaging an ex-vessel value of approximately \$59.6 million a year. The commercial Dungeness crab fishery aims to maintain the economic and biological health of the fishery and preserve the fishing heritage and communities that rely on the resource. However, recently concerns have been raised around the unintentional entanglement of whales in vertical fishing lines. Reducing the likelihood of these interactions and improving the outcomes for entangled animals has become a management priority for this fishery.

Fishermen-led Solutions

In response to these challenges, the Half Moon Bay (HMB) Commercial Fisheries Trust, partnering with members of the Half Moon Bay Seafood Marketing Association, took the initiative to design and test a fishermen-driven model recovering lost Dungeness crab gear in the vicinity of Half Moon Bay, California. The HMB Commercial Fisheries Trust approached TNC to collaborate and support the project in its first year as an opportunity to not only recover a significant amount of lost gear in local waters, but provide useful information on how these place-based pilot projects could be improved and expanded to include other ports. The intention was to provide timely lessons to inform the ongoing discussions around related regulatory and/or legislative changes in support of lost gear recovery.

Though the project was developed and launched on a very short timeline (prior to the anticipated start of the commercial crab season), it was successful in gathering local knowledge on the locations of lost pots and in contracting local vessels to recover those pots. During the process, the participating fishermen gained experience working well with enforcement, coordinating with parallel projects in other ports and in meeting the logistical challenges associated with gear recovery projects.

Project Results

The project was conducted over a period of 6 weeks and 6 sea days. During this time, the 3 participating vessels, supported by 2 individuals onshore, retrieved a total of 182 crab pots. The total expenses incurred were under \$15,000, and costs continue to be recovered.

Lessons Learned

The success of this project has illustrated how fishermen and fishing associations can be a part of the solution by working together and taking the initiative to create new methods and tools to address management challenges. The fishermen-driven model designed through this project will be improved and expanded in the coming months. We hope that the information and learning this pilot project has provided will inform the important discussions around the ultimate design of necessary supporting regulations required for these efforts to expand up and down the coast.

