

California Dungeness Crab Task Force

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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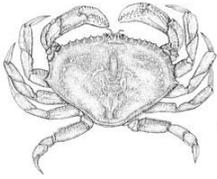
California Dungeness Crab Fishermen Take Proactive Steps to Reduce Risk of Whale Entanglements

Ukiah, California — The California Dungeness Crab fishing industry is committed to ensuring a quality product on the market while minimizing interactions between whales and Dungeness crab fishing gear. Working in partnership with state and federal agencies and conservation organizations, the Dungeness crab industry is leading efforts to establish a statewide program to recover lost fishing gear, become trained as first responders to entangled whales, create a [best practices guide](#), and support agency efforts to improve data collection and reporting. These strategies and tools will be developed during the 2015-16 fishing season to be responsive to the recent increase in whales entangled in fixed-gear fisheries along the West Coast.

At its October 26-27, 2015 meeting, the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF), which is administered by the California Ocean Protection Council, approved development of an industry-led, statewide program to recover lost fishing gear, which will be sent to the California Legislature in January 2016. This action to clean up “ghost gear” will reduce the potential for whales to become entangled in lost traps. The DCTF also heralded the work of a [cross-interest working group](#) charged with developing strategies and tools to address the complex issue of whale entanglements. There was unanimous DCTF support for the outcomes of this state-led working group, including gaining additional information to better understand the causes of entanglements, as well as involving fishermen in testing gear modifications and data collection tools such as e-logbooks and aerial surveys. Over the next year, the Dungeness crab industry will collaborate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the California Ocean Protection Council to begin implementing the working group’s recommendations.

“The California Ocean Protection Council commends the Dungeness crab industry for being responsive to this unfortunate uptick in whale entanglements along the West Coast. The industry’s leadership presents a new alternative for utilizing collaborative partnerships among fishing industry, agencies, and conservation organizations to address such challenging issues,” said Catherine Kuhlman, Ocean Protection Council Executive Director and Deputy Secretary for Oceans and Coastal Policy for the California Natural Resources Agency.

For decades, the Dungeness crab fishery has operated as a responsible, conscientious industry focused on supplying consumers with a quality product while maintaining a healthy and sustainable crab population in California waters, while also supporting California coastal communities. In 1995, fishermen initiated a program to cap commercial fishing capacity by restricting the number of fishery participants. Over the last six years, the DCTF has worked to develop and refine a commercial trap limit program that was first implemented during the



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2013-2014 fishing season to cap the number of traps in the ocean each year. These actions coincide with the industry's recent efforts to play a proactive role in reducing the number of lost traps in the ocean after the close of the season and investigating other strategies to reduce the risk of whale entanglements.

The California Dungeness Crab Task Force stated that fishermen were unaware until recently that there has been an increase in whale entanglements in California. As an industry, they are deeply committed to being part of the solution in helping the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the National Marine Fisheries Service to gain a better understanding of the root causes of whale entanglements, which are currently unclear.

The DCTF will forward send a series of recommendations developed by the DCTF and the working group to the California Legislature in January 2016. The commercial Dungeness crab fishery will open for the 2015-16 fishing season pending results of domoic acid testing.

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The DCTF was established pursuant to the requirements of Senate Bill 369 and is responsible for reviewing and making recommendations regarding the current management of the Dungeness crab fishery. For more information about the DCTF, please visit the Ocean Protection Council's website:

<http://www.opc.ca.gov/2009/04/dungeness-crab-task-force/>. For more information about the Dungeness Crab Working Group visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/2015/08/public-meeting-to-discuss-whale-entanglements-off-california/>.