

CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

RECOMMENDATIONS MEMO

TO: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Charlton Bonham, Director
Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, Mike McGuire, Chair
California Fish and Game Commission, Eric Sklar, President
Pacific Fishery Management Council, Philip Anderson, Chair

CC: National Marine Fisheries, Protected Resources Division, Penny Ruvelas, Long Beach Branch Chief
California Ocean Protection Council, Deborah Halberstadt, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission, Valerie Termini, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission, Susan Ashcraft, Marine Advisor
Pacific Fishery Management Council, Chuck Tracy, Executive Director
National Marine Sanctuaries, West Coast Regional Office, Lisa Wooninck, Policy Coordinator
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Dave Colpo, Senior Program Manager
California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF), DCTF Administrative Team

FROM: California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group

DATE: January 10, 2018

RE: 2017-18 updates and recommendations to reduce whale entanglements

APPENDICES: [Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program \(RAMP\) Overview](#)
[RAMP Pilot October 26 & November 6, 2017 Convenings Update](#)
[RAMP Pilot November 30, 2017 Convening Status Update](#)
[CA Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group Fact Sheet](#)
[2017-18 Best Fishing Practices Guide](#)

Since September 2015, the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group), a diverse multi-stakeholder group, has been taking steps to identify and reduce risk of whale entanglements. The Working Group met on May 16-17, July 18-19, and September 27-28 to continue developing solutions to support thriving whale populations along the West Coast and a thriving and profitable Dungeness crab fishery.

Draft Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP): In May 2017, the group identified the need for a process that could help identify circumstances that can elevate risk and develop pathways to addressing these situations. The Working Group has considered an approach that is rooted in best fishing practices and is flexible to be responsive to elevated entanglement risk. Involving a range of experts — agencies, fishermen, researchers, representatives from environmental organizations (NGOs), and others—who will work collaboratively to evaluate risk, identify information needs, and assess the need for voluntary and/or (longer-term) mandatory management options that could be recommended to CDFW is key to the program's success. The Working Group has developed a draft Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) to support the state in working with experts (fishermen, researchers, NGOs, etc.) to identify and assess elevated levels of entanglement risk and determine the need for management options to reduce risk of entanglement.

2017-2018 RAMP Pilot: The Working Group agreed to pilot the draft RAMP during the 2017-18 Dungeness crab fishing season. All aspects of the draft RAMP are voluntary during this pilot phase and apply to both recreational and commercial fishing. The voluntary pilot is providing an opportunity to test the draft RAMP's structure and function, explore aspects that would require legislative support or formal rulemaking, and to learn what may need to be adjusted and fine-tuned, including the program's working assumptions and guiding principles. During the RAMP pilot, commercial and recreational fishermen and others involved in the California Dungeness crab fishing industry are invited to review the draft RAMP approach and provide feedback on all aspects of the program. Ideas on how to improve the Working Group's approach to assessing risk, considerations for possible management measures, and suggestions related to new technologies are welcomed and encouraged. Additionally, the Working Group is planning to hold a select number of meetings in 2018 at port locations in an effort to share information and address questions.

Information learned during the 2017-18 pilot phase will be shared with CDFW, NMFS, OPC, Fish and Game Commission, Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, and California Dungeness Crab Task Force in summer/fall 2018. Feedback and inquiries can be sent to info@cawhalegroup.com or call 707-832-4088.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were identified by the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) over the course of three meetings in 2017. This information is intended to help inform decision makers and those interested in this issue, including other fixed gear fisheries. The recommendations are also supported by the California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) (see December 2017 Legislative Report ([here](#))). The administration of the Working Group is supported by the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), with in-kind contributions from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

Recommendation #1. Establish Standardized Gear-marking for all California Fixed-Gear Fisheries: Over 50% of whale entanglements reported to NMFS have been classified as "unknown" gear type, making it challenging to gather information about the origins of entanglements (e.g., fishery, gear set-up, timing, etc.) and work to reduce entanglement risk. In response to this, the Working Group recommends that CDFW and the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), in partnership with the Legislature, work with other fixed-gear fisheries and fisheries known to be involved in whale entanglements to establish standardized gear marking. The Working Group recommends gear markings focus on surface gear, which may be more visible if involved in an entanglement. The Working Group understands that managers may need to be flexible and adaptive when developing standardized gear marking to work through any complexities that may arise. The Working Group encourages CDFW, in partnership with NMFS, to identify gear marking options expeditiously.

Recommendation #2. Secure Long-term Funding to Support RAMP Implementation: The Working Group acknowledges the need to seek additional long-term funding to support RAMP implementation to reduce entanglements risk, including the development of potential management measures. This will sustain RAMP coordination and operations, fund research and data gathering to inform the risk assessment process, and support future research and development. Informed by the RAMP pilot, the Working Group recommends that CDFW and the Legislature encourage the state to secure long-term funding to support all aspects of RAMP implementation.

The Working Group looks forward to continuing to engage with the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (the Legislature), CDFW, the California Fish and Game Commission, DCTF, and others to inform Working Group discussions and share Working Group outputs. The Working Group welcomes the opportunity to have direct communications at any time about the draft RAMP and continues to be committed to work in partnership with CDFW and the Legislature to provide recommendations to reduce whale entanglement risk.