

CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

March 19, 2019 Convenings

Evaluation Team Advisory

2018-19 Whale Entanglement Risk Assessment & Mitigation Program (RAMP)

On March 19, 2019, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Ocean Protection Council, convened the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group)'s Evaluation Team to proactively discuss and assess the relative risk of entanglements following reports of increased humpback whale concentrations. The Working Group identified the following risk levels for humpback whales:

Humpback Whales		
Risk Factors	Current Entanglement Risk Assessment (March 19, 2019)	Entanglement Risk Assessment Outlook (April/May 2019)
Entanglements	LOW	MODERATE TO HIGH
Forage/ocean conditions	MODERATE	MODERATE TO HIGH
Whale concentrations	LOW	LOW TO HIGH*
Fishing dynamics	LOW TO MODERATE	LOW TO HIGH*

*Outlook considers regional variability and considers spatial differences of where whales may be congregated.

More information and rationale for the scoring of each factor is [available here](#) (also see "Summary" section below for additional details). The Working Group anticipates changes in the distribution and concentrations of whales in the coming weeks and all risk factors will continue to be monitored closely and responded to as needed.

The Working Group encourages recreational Dungeness crab fishermen and other commercial and recreational fishermen engaged in fixed gear fisheries to fish as minimal gear as possible and remove any gear that cannot be serviced within required timeframes. When possible, fishermen should consider reducing the number of traps that are being actively fished to reduce vertical lines in the water and avoid fishing in areas where there are groups of feeding or migrating whales, schools of anchovy, and/or swarms of krill.

This update will be shared via the [DCTF email list](#), the [Working Group webpage](#), and [CDFW's crab webpage](#). The Working Group welcomes your feedback and insights about the Working Group's efforts and the 2018-19 RAMP. Please visit <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group> or contact the Working Group at info@cawhalegroup.com.

Summary

The Evaluation Team was convened in response to a report of increased whale activity by members of the whale watch community received on March 15, 2019. Due to optimal weather conditions, on March 15 and 16, 2019 two aerial surveys were coordinated from Pt Lobos north to Gualala ([here](#)) where information on whales,

forage/prey, and Dungeness crab trap distribution was collected. Additional information related to whale concentrations ([here](#)), ocean conditions ([here](#)), fishing dynamics (via fishermen's on-the-water observations), and entanglements ([here](#)) was also gathered in advance of the March 19 Evaluation Team call.

The Evaluation Team determined that humpback whales are beginning to arrive in Dungeness crab fishing grounds. Although humpback and blue whales have not yet arrived in their traditional feeding grounds in moderate or high numbers, humpbacks are expected to arrive in greater numbers the next 2-3 week and blues in April/May. Grey whales are continuing to migrate north and appear to be at minimal risk for entanglement, primarily due to the speed they are traveling (i.e., not remaining in one place for an extended period of time). 1,767 crab traps were observed during the aerial survey in concentrations of up to 12 traps per transect, with fishermen reporting that gear is continually being brought to the dock. The March 14 El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) report indicates a mild El Niño this spring (~80%) and summer (~60%) which has implications for forage and whale distributions. Additionally, based on the aerial survey, fishermen's observations, and previous forage reports, it is anticipated that this spring we will see strong abundance of both krill and anchovies.