

California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) 2019-20 Management Recommendations Form

Discussion Date: February 7, 2020 Recommendation Finalized: February 11, 2020

The Working Group requests this recommendation and supporting information be considered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director prior to the February 15 risk determination.

A. Identified risk(s) and severity

Based on the information available during the February 7, 2020 discussion, the Working Group's risk assessment associated with the four RAMP factors is as follows:

- **Entanglement: Risk is low**
- **Marine Life Concentrations: Risk is low**
- **Ocean and Forage Conditions: Risk is low**
- **Fishing Dynamics: Risk is low**

Rationale supporting this risk assessment is provided in Section B.

B. Available information

The Working Group's discussion was informed by the Data Compilation¹ provided by CDFW, in partnership with Working Group advisors, on February 4, as well as additional real-time contributions during the February 7 discussion. Rationale and key information which informed the assessment are summarized below for each factor.

Entanglement (Humpback Whales, Blue Whales, Leatherback Sea Turtles) - Rationale

- There have been no confirmed entanglements with California commercial Dungeness crab fishing gear during the current fishing season; therefore, risk is low.

¹ <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=177130&inline>

Marine Life Concentrations (Humpback Whales, Blue Whales, Leatherback Sea Turtles) - Rationale

- Humpback Whale observations in Monterey Bay have continued to decline since late December 2019, indicating most have returned to their winter breeding grounds. The average number of Humpback Whales per half-day trip during the last two weeks was 1.5 whales, with none observed most days; this is below the Working Group's "low risk" threshold of 5 whales.
- No Blue Whales have been observed in Monterey Bay since mid-December 2019, consistent with their southward winter migration.
- Satellite tagging data from 6 Leatherback Sea Turtles shows all individuals are far south and west of California foraging areas. One sea turtle is approaching nesting beaches in the Western Pacific, and one sea turtle is in Hawaii. There is no indication they have begun their return migration to California waters.

Ocean and Forage Conditions – Rationale

- The Oceanic Niño Index is currently average/neutral and forecasted to remain neutral into the spring. El Niño conditions are not expected in California waters and are continuing to be monitored.
- The North Pacific High is at its highest level since 2013, indicating cool water temperatures and strong upwelling. Unless impacted by changes in storm frequency in February and March, cool waters, positive upwelling, and high krill abundance are anticipated this spring.
- Fishermen reported very cold water in many areas along the California coast (between 51 and 54 degrees) and small balls of anchovy in nearshore waters.

Fishing Dynamics - Rationale

- Lower fishing effort in some ports has been observed as gear is hauled out for the season. This is particularly true for vessels that participate in other spring fisheries (e.g. black cod, salmon).
- For some fishermen in both central and northern ports, the spring fishery is very important and they will continue to fish, particularly given an anticipated increased price for live crab during the spring months.

- The 2019 Novel Coronavirus has eliminated exports to China, negatively impacting price.

C. Management recommendation(s)

Based on the above assessment of risk across all four factors, the Working Group does not recommend any management action by the CDFW Director at this time. This recommendation applies statewide. The Working Group continues to encourage commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fishery participants to use best practices, as outlined in their current Best Practices Guide².

Should an entanglement be confirmed in California commercial Dungeness crab gear prior to their next scheduled assessment, the Working Group intends to reconvene to discuss an updated assessment of risk and any need for management actions.

D. Alternatives

The Working Group arrived at the above risk assessment and recommendations by consensus. No minority recommendations were expressed.

² http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/_media_library/2019/11/2019-20_BPG_Final.pdf