

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

Discussion Date: June 26, 2020; Recommendation Finalized: June 30, 2020

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

A. Identified risk(s) and severity

Based on the information available during the June 26, 2020 discussion, the Working Group's risk assessment associated with the four RAMP factors for the Northern Management Area (NMA) is as follows:

- **Ocean and Forage Conditions: Risk is low**
- **Entanglement: Risk is low**
- **Fishing Dynamics: Risk is low**
- **Marine Life Concentrations: Risk is low (majority), risk is unknown (minority)**

Given that the commercial fishery has been closed in the Central Management Area (CMA) since May 15, the Working Group did not feel it was necessary to conduct a formal assessment of risk for the CMA; however, relevant portions of their discussion are summarized in Section B. Rationale supporting the above risk assessment for the NMA is also provided in Section B. The Working Group's overall assessment of risk for the NMA, and recommended management measures for both management areas, is provided in Section C. Rationale for the minority risk assessment is provided in Section D.

B. Available information

The Working Group's discussion was informed by the Data Compilation¹ provided by CDFW, in partnership with Working Group advisors, on June 24, as well as additional real-

¹ <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=180532&inline>

time contributions during the June 26 discussion. Rationale and key information which informed the assessment are summarized below for each factor.

Ocean and Forage Conditions – Rationale

- As noted in the Data Compilation, updated oceanographic and forage indices were not available for this assessment. In the absence of updated information, the Working Group determined there was no basis for changing their June 9 assessment of risk for this factor and that risk remains low in the NMA. Rationale for the June 9 assessment is contained in their June 12 memo².
- On-the-water reports from fishermen indicate high krill concentrations are still present off Point Reyes, and abundant pyrosomes are still being observed. This is consistent with reports considered during the June 9 assessment.

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

- There have been no confirmed entanglements in California commercial Dungeness crab gear during the 2019-20 season in the NMA; therefore, risk is low.
- There was one additional confirmed humpback whale entanglement since the last Working Group meeting. While the entanglement was reported off Point Reyes (i.e. in the CMA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) confirmed the entanglement was a result of Oregon commercial Dungeness crab gear. Under the Working Group's Risk Assessment Framework and CDFW's proposed regulations implementing the RAMP, this entanglement does not meet the criteria to elevate risk in California waters since the source of the gear is known and was confirmed in non-California commercial Dungeness crab gear.

Fishing Dynamics - Rationale

- Port surveys conducted by the California Coast Crab Association indicate a 40% reduction in the amount of actively fished commercial gear in the NMA since the June 9 risk assessment. Given these further declines in the amount of commercial gear, risk remains low in the NMA.

² <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=180447&inline>

- While the commercial Dungeness crab fishery has been closed since May 15 in the CMA, the recreational crab fishery remains open until June 30th. On-the-water reports indicate limited remaining recreational effort in the Pillar Point area.

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

- The Working Group noted the challenges of assessing risk for humpback and blue whales given the amount of time since the last aerial surveys were conducted (prior to the May 26 risk assessment), and that recent surveys have only provided qualitative data.
- Based on available documentation, Working Group advisors have confirmed multiple leatherback sea turtles are now present in Monterey Bay. Based on telemetry and aerial survey information from prior years, Working Group advisors anticipate they will remain south of Point Reyes until August, when water temperatures increase to the north.
- On-the-water observations from fishermen suggest humpback and blue whales are not present within NMA fishing grounds. Combined with typical seasonal patterns for these species, and the information above regarding leatherback sea turtle distribution, a majority assessed risk for this factor as low for all three species in the NMA.

C. Management recommendation(s)

The Working Group unanimously determined overall risk (across all four RAMP factors) remains low for the NMA. In particular, the Working Group highlighted that there has been no change since the June 9 risk assessment for the NMA, other than further declines in fishing activity. The Working Group supports ongoing discussions within their Data Project Team to identify opportunities for additional data collection within the NMA (e.g. aerial and vessel surveys) to be made available throughout future seasons.

Based on the overall assessment of risk, and acknowledging the limited window before the statutory NMA closure on July 15, the Working Group does not recommend any mandatory management measures at this time. The Working Group continues to encourage removal of

lost or abandoned fishing gear from the CMA, and focused removal efforts both prior to and after the closure of the NMA. The Working Group requests commercial and recreational ocean users report locations of lost or abandoned commercial Dungeness crab gear to CDFW to further facilitate these retrieval efforts.

D. Alternatives

A minority, two members, assessed risk for the marine life concentrations factor in the NMA as unknown rather than low. Portions of the NMA serve as known foraging grounds for humpback whales, blue whales, and leatherback sea turtles. Historical entanglement information indicates humpback whales have been entangled in this area in prior seasons. In the absence of recent systematic aerial survey data, or other standardized survey efforts, the minority assessed risk for this factor as unknown for the NMA.