

# California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) Management Recommendation to inform the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife

## **Working Group Discussion Date: January 10, 2024**

There was limited support for Marine Region's preliminary management recommendation for a season opener in Fishing Zones 3-6 under a 70% Gear Reduction (trap reduction). The Working Group conveyed support for a management action, specifically a Gear Reduction, that maximizes fishing opportunity while balancing entanglement risk. However, the Working Group was clear that a 70% Gear Reduction was not an economically viable option for the commercial fleet. The Working Group also emphasized the importance of prioritizing the issue of lost and abandoned gear as it relates to whale and turtle entanglements.

## Working Group Recommendation: Commercial Fishery (Fishing Zones 3-6)

The Working Group provided a recommendation to open the commercial fishery on January 18, 2024, at 12:01am, in Fishing Zones 3-6 (pre-soak to begin on January 15, 2024, at 8:00am) under a 50% Gear Reduction. The key rationale being that a 70% Gear Reduction is not economically viable for the commercial fleet as it would have significant labor and staffing impacts along with broader impacts to coastal communities. Working Group members also stated that current RAMP thresholds are based on outdated whale abundance estimates and do not reflect the increase in humpback whale populations in California. This recommendation received broad support with limited opposition.

## Working Group Recommendation: Commercial Fishery (Fishing Zones 3-6)

The Working Group provided a second recommendation to open the commercial fishery on January 18, 2024, at 12:01am, in Fishing Zones 3-6 (pre-soak to begin on January 15, 2024, at 8:00am) with no restrictions on fishing gear. Working Group members stated that Gear Reductions in the past have not effectively minimized entanglement risk. Entanglement risk is perceived to be low enough to allow the season to open in these Fishing Zones with full tier allotment due to the low numbers of humpback whales as they migrate to their winter breeding grounds. Members also responded to Marine Region's preliminary assessment rationale stating that effort shift between Fishing Zones would not be a significant factor in determining a Gear Reduction. This recommendation received broad support with limited opposition.

## Working Group Recommendation: Recreational Fishery (Fishing Zones 3-4)

The Working Group recommended an implementation date of January 11, 2024 (or date of the Director's Declaration) to lift the recreational crab trap prohibition in Fishing Zones 3 and 4. This recommendation received broad support with limited opposition.