

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: March 12, 2024

There was broad support for the Marine Region's preliminary recommendation to continue the current Management Actions in place for both the commercial and recreational fisheries. This includes the continuation of the 50% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6 for the commercial fishery and continuation of the Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones in both fisheries. Many of the Working Group recommendations include a Depth Constraint to minimize entanglement risk in the spring season. The majority of the Working Group expressed support for this type of action, but not during the current Risk Assessment. Many members of the Working Group recommended waiting until more data is collected to inform the next risk assessment and to discuss at the upcoming Working Group meeting on March 27, 2024.

Working Group Recommendation #1: Commercial and Recreational Fisheries (Season Closure in All Fishing Zones)

The Working Group provided a recommendation to close the commercial and recreational fisheries statewide on April 1, 2024. The key rationale being the need to be extremely precautionary and risk adverse at this point in the season, given current Impact Scores, entanglement history, and current whale migration. In addition, a Marine Life Concentration trigger was reached in Fishing Zone 4, where 22 humpback whales were observed in a single half-day trip by Monterey Bay Whale Watch. By giving the fleet more advanced notice for a closure, the fleet would be able to remove gear from the water in a safe and effective manner. **This recommendation received limited support and broad opposition.**

Working Group Recommendation #2: Commercial Fishery (Depth Constraint in Fishing Zones 1-2 and Season Closure in Fishing Zones 3-6)

The Working Group provided a second recommendation for the commercial fishery to implement a 30-fathom Depth Constraint in Fishing Zones 1-2 and to close the season in Fishing Zones 3-6 on April 1, 2024. Rationale for a Depth Constraint in Fishing Zones 1-2 include humpback whale migration and feeding patterns. Humpback whales tend to stay further offshore in northern areas, avoiding shallower depths where fishing activity could still occur. The closure of

Fishing Zones 3-6 sufficiently reduces the elevated entanglement risk during the spring months and considers the elevated Impact Scores. This recommendation aims to balance entanglement risk while providing fishing opportunities to the fleet in Fishing Zones 1-2. **This recommendation received limited support and broad opposition.**

Working Group Recommendation #3: Commercial Fishery (Depth Constraint in all Fishing Zones)

The Working Group provided a third recommendation to implement a 30-fathom Depth Constraint for the commercial fishery across all Fishing Zones to begin on April 1, 2024. This recommendation would maintain the 50% Gear Reduction already in place for Fishing Zones 3-6. This recommendation aims to reduce entanglement risk that is typically elevated during the spring months while allowing for continued fishing opportunities. **This recommendation received limited support and limited opposition.**

Working Group Recommendation #4: Commercial Fishery (Depth Constraint in Fishing Zones 3-6)

The Working Group provided a fourth recommendation to implement a 30-fathom Depth Constraint for the commercial fishery across in Fishing Zones 3-6 to begin on April 1, 2024. This recommendation would maintain the 50% Gear Reduction already in place for Fishing Zones 3-6. This recommendation aims to reduce entanglement risk that is typically elevated during the spring months while allowing for continued fishing opportunities. **This recommendation received limited support and limited opposition.**