

# 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: December 17, 2025**

The Working Group discussed Marine Region's preliminary recommendation for commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries. For the commercial fishery the Department recommended a season opener with a 25% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 pending quality and Domoic acid testing requirements and a season opener on January 2, 2026, with a 50% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 3, 4, and 5. For the recreational fishery, Marine Region recommended lifting the Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 1, 3, and 4 on January 2, 2026.

The Working Group provided its recommendations by fishery and Management Area. The Working Group provided moderate support and moderate opposition for Marine Region's recommendation for the commercial fishery in Fishing Zones 1 and 2. The Working Group provided broad support and limited opposition for Marine Region's recommendation for the commercial fishery in Fishing Zones 3, 4, and 5. The Working Group provided broad support and limited opposition for Marine Region's recommendation for the recreational fishery. It is important to note that although many Working Group members provided support for Marine Region's preliminary recommendations to open the commercial fishery under a Gear Reduction, they also shared that their ports requested 100% gear allotments once entanglement risk had sufficiently been reduced after the next scheduled Risk Assessment in mid-January 2026. The Working Group also provided three alternative recommendations:

### **Working Group Recommendation #1 Season Opener with 100% Gear in the Commercial Fishery in Fishing Zones 1 and 2**

The Working Group provided a recommendation for a season opener with 100% of gear when domoic acid and crab quality testing requirements are met. The key rationale was that there is no scientific proof that gear reductions reduce entanglement risk when whales are not present, and that gear reductions impose an undue economic burden on the fleet particularly in February when Dungeness crabs begin to clutch. This recommendation received broad support and limited opposition.

### **Working Group Recommendation #2 Season Opener with 100% Gear in the Commercial Fishery in Fishing Zones 3, 4, and 5**

The Working Group provided a recommendation for a season opener with 100% of gear allotments. The Working Group suggested that gear could be set on January 5<sup>th</sup> for a January 8<sup>th</sup> season opener. The key rationale was that there is no scientific proof that

gear reductions reduce entanglement risk when whales are not present, and that gear reductions impose an undue economic burden on the fleet, particularly in February when Dungeness crabs begin to clutch. This recommendation received moderate support and limited opposition.

### **Working Group Recommendation #3** Lift Crab Trap Prohibition for the recreational fishery in all Fishing Zones.

The Working Group provided a recommendation that the Crab Trap Prohibition be lifted for Fishing Zones 1, 3, and 4, with an effective date to follow the commercial fishery season opener dates. This recommendation received broad support and limited opposition.