

CDFW Moves Quickly to Close the Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery Statewide in Response to Humpback Whale Entanglements

April 21, 2022



California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director Charlton H. Bonham has assessed entanglement risk under the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP) and announced the closure of the commercial Dungeness crab fishery in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 (Sonoma/Mendocino county line to the Oregon state line) effective at noon on April 20, 2022. This closure is being implemented in addition to a closure of Zones 3 through 6 announced on March 25 because of three recent humpback whale entanglements involving California commercial Dungeness crab fishing gear. All commercial Dungeness crab traps must be removed from the fishing grounds in Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6 by noon on April 8 and by noon on April 20 in Zones 1 and 2. In addition, the Director has authorized the Lost and Abandoned Gear Retrieval Program to begin removing commercial Dungeness crab traps left in the water starting April 15 at noon in Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6 and April 27 at noon in Zones 1 and 2.

“We received reports of additional humpback whale entanglements and moved quickly to close the fishery to protect migrating humpback whales that are just starting to return to California waters,” said Director Bonham. “While this poses an economic impact on certain sectors of our coastal fishing communities, it is important to protect both whales and the long-term viability of the commercial fishery. We will be working

with the fishing fleet, researchers and other agencies to better understand these recent entanglement events and find ways to mitigate this risk in future seasons.”

CDFW asks fishermen and mariners to be on the lookout for and report any entangled whales so a disentanglement response team can be mobilized to remove the gear. Reports can be made to 1-877-SOS-WHALE or contact the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF Channel 16. The recreational fishery remains open statewide but may be subject to a future trap restriction as humpback whales return to California waters to forage during the spring and summer. The recreational fishery should be ready to respond to minimize risk. To that end, CDFW reminds everyone in the commercial and recreational fisheries to implement best practices, as described in the Best Practices Guide.

A map of all Fishing Zones can be found on the CDFW website. For more information related to the risk assessment process, please visit CDFW’s Whale Safe Fisheries page. For more information on the Dungeness crab fishery, please visit CDFW’s Crab page, including FAQs for the 2021-22 commercial fishing season and FAQs for the new recreational crab trap regulations.