

## Dungeness crab season delayed due to whales

December 2, 2020



The commercial Dungeness crab season in the central management area, Point Arena to the Mexico border, will continue to be delayed due to the presence of whales within fishing grounds and the potential for entanglement.

The commercial Dungeness crab season in the northern management area was scheduled to open Sunday, Dec. 1, but was delayed until at least Wednesday, Dec. 16, due to low meat quality. Meat quality testing and delays are a long-standing tri-state industry supported component of the season opener to ensure high quality crab at the start of the fisheries in northern California, Oregon and Washington. In early December, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife director will re-assess entanglement risk in the central management area and evaluate risk in the northern management area to inform the season opener for both areas.

CDFW in partnership with researchers, federal agencies and the fishing industry has conducted surveys from the Oregon state line to the Channel Islands to observe marine life concentrations. CDFW has conducted five aerial surveys since late October and more than 10 vessel-based surveys have been conducted by researchers

and the fishing industry. Additional sources of data include observations from a network of observers spread across three national marine sanctuaries.

Based on those data sources, “CDFW, after consulting with the Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group, is enacting a delay in the central management area,” said CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham. “Available data indicates the whales still remain in the fishing grounds. This risk assessment focused on the central management area because the northern management area was already delayed due to low meat quality. CDFW staff, collaborators and partners have scheduled additional surveys in the next few weeks that, weather permitting, are anticipated to provide the data necessary to reassess whale presence. Our hope is both quality testing and additional marine life survey data will support a unified statewide opener on Dec. 16, just in time to have crab for the holidays and New Year.”

CDFW is planning additional aerial surveys for the first week of December to inform a risk assessment in advance of Dec. 16. When the data indicates the whales have migrated out of the fishing grounds, CDFW stands ready to open the commercial season.

For more information on Dungeness crab, please visit [www.wildlife.ca.gov/crab](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/crab).