

# Best Practices Guide:

## California Dungeness Crab Fishing

### Ways to Minimize Whale Entanglement Risk

**Whale Entanglement  
Response Hotline  
(877)-SOS-WHALE  
(877)-767-9425  
Or Hail USCG on  
Channel 16**

### Suggestions to minimize entanglement risk in fishing gear:

- When trap is in the water, use the proper length and weighting of lines to **keep the line between the trap and buoy running vertical and taut**. Whales are more likely to become entangled with slack lines. Use the minimum amount of scope required to compensate for tides, currents, and weather, as necessary. When changing set location throughout the season, adjust the length and weighting of trap lines as necessary to maintain taut vertical lines.
- Configure gear to **minimize the extent of line that could be floating at the surface** at any time. Use sinking or weighted vertical lines and minimize the amount of trailing surface gear used.
- Maintain gear to **ensure lines and buoys are in good working condition** and will not break under natural conditions such that gear could become lost or irretrievable. Lost gear contributes to marine debris and increases the risk of whale entanglement.
- **All gear should be clearly marked** consistent with applicable regulation. All gear should be maintained so markings are clearly legible to facilitate correct identification of the origins of gear involved in entanglements.
- **Avoid setting gear in the vicinity of whales** whenever possible.
- **Avoid setting gear in the trawl zones or in shipping lanes**. Large vessels in heavily trafficked areas, like shipping lanes, can displace fishing gear. This can result in tangled gear which may increase the risk of entanglements.
- **If you encounter lost gear: Notify the owner or put out a call on the local VHF**. You can also report lost fishing gear to the Sea Doc Society by phone (1-888-491-GEAR) or online at: <http://www.seadocsociety.org/report/>

Gray whale



Humpback whale



### Reporting entangled whales:

- **Report entangled whales IMMEDIATELY** to the NMFS whale entanglement response hotline at **1-877-SOS-WHALE (1-877-767-9425)** or hail the **U.S. Coast Guard on Channel 16**. See tips on reverse side for details on reporting. If possible, stand by for responders.
- **Respond promptly if you are contacted** by NMFS, CDFW, or any other government agency regarding a whale entangled in your gear and provide as much information as possible regarding your fishing gear and practices. Gaining a better understanding of where, when, and how entanglements are occurring is essential in working to prevent them in the future.



If you have a suggestion for reducing entanglements in fishing gear, contact Justin Viezbicke, NMFS West Coast Region, Whale Entanglement Response Coordinator, [Justin.Viezbicke@noaa.gov](mailto:Justin.Viezbicke@noaa.gov), (562) 980-3230.



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## If you see an entangled whale...

### Record the following information to help responders:

- Date
- Time of last sighting (24 hr clock)
- Your name, vessel name/call sign, phone #
- General or specific location (lat/long)
- Species
- Approximate size/age class
- General condition of whale
- Is the animal moving (speed/heading)?
- Description of gear (markings, colors, shape)
- Weather/seas (wind, swell, visibility)
- If possible, document with photos (see photographing tips below)

### Information to assist in reporting:

Gray and humpback whales are the species most commonly reported entangled, although blue whales, fin whales, killer whales and sperm whales have also been reported.

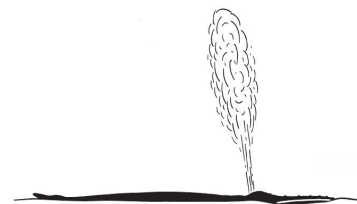
#### Gray Whale

Body coloration mottled gray; frequently with yellowish to reddish whale lice on head and other parts of the body; hump about 3/5ths back on the body (no dorsal fin); heart-shaped blow; fluke (tail) raised before dives; up to 48 feet long; migrates between Alaska to Baja California, though some individuals, can be resident along the coast all year; most commonly observed late December through June; cow/calf pairs tend to be closer to shore late March through May.



#### Humpback Whale

Body dark gray, often with white patches on underside; flukes can be all dark to nearly all white; long flippers are dark above and white on underside; blow erect and bushy on top half; flukes raised before diving; up to 52 feet long; migrates from Central America and Mexico to southern British Columbia; most commonly observed in May through November; typically congregate near deep water canyons for feeding but can be found nearshore if following prey.



If possible, **stay and observe the whale** from a safe distance until trained responders arrive. Entangled whales are unpredictable and potentially dangerous for rescuers.

### Photographing entangled whales:

**Whale:** side view of dorsal fin (or hump); flukes (especially underside if raised); head; any part of the body where gear may be present.

**Entanglement:** buoy(s); tags; lines on the body; trailing lines (including distance from whale); netting (if present); other gear if present.



Best Practices Guide was developed by the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group

Illustrations provided by Pieter Folkens

