

2016-17 Best Practices Guide to Minimize Whale Entanglement Risk

Support for Best Practices

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has confirmed significant increases in large whale entanglements over the last few years, and specifically in California Dungeness crab fishing gear. This situation threatens the stability of the fishery and coastal fishing communities. In response, a Working Group has developed this Best Practices Guide to highlight voluntary actions believed to be an important step towards reducing whale entanglements.

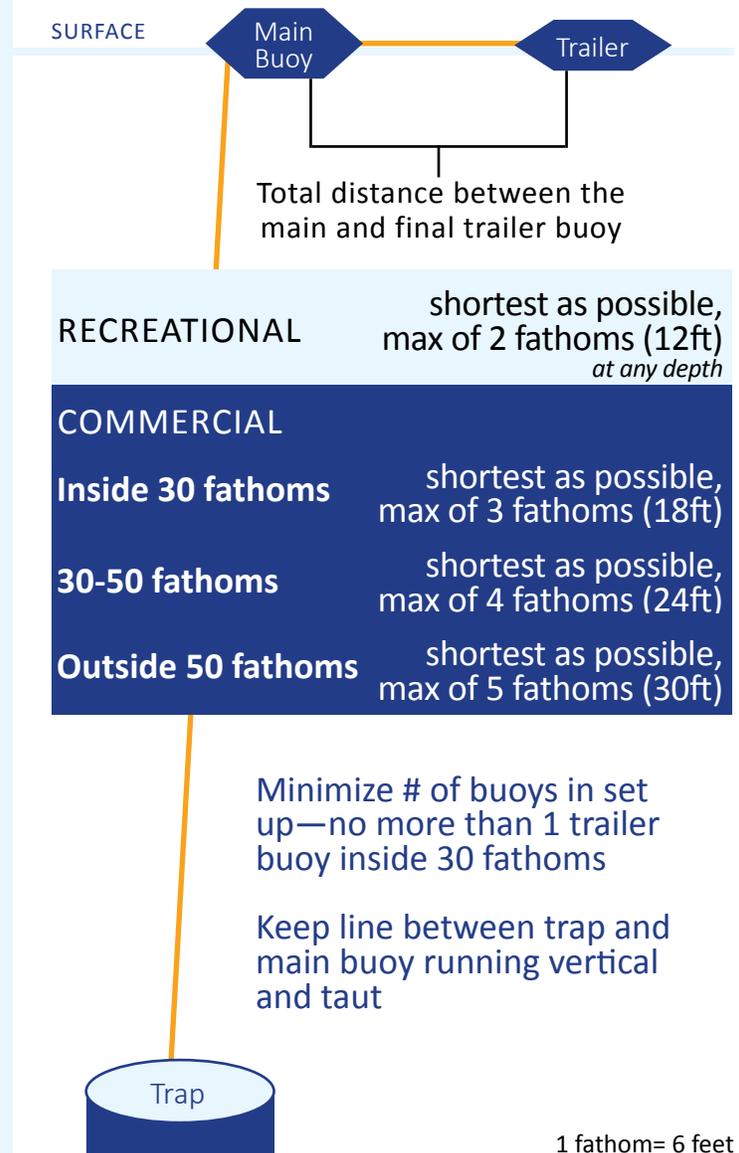


MMHSRP Permit# 18786 | Stephanie Marcos

BEST PRACTICES

- **No excess lines should be floating at the surface.** Floating line should only be between the main buoy and trailer.
- **When changing set location across depths, adjust the length of trap lines** by adjusting shots (i.e., measured length of line) to maintain taut vertical lines.
- **Avoid setting gear in the vicinity of whales** whenever possible.
- **Maintain gear to ensure lines and buoys are in good working condition** and will not break under natural conditions causing gear to become lost or irretrievable. Lost gear contributes to marine debris and increases the risk of whale entanglements.
- **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 the gear involved in entanglements.
- **Use the minimum amount of scope** required to compensate for tides, currents and weather, as necessary. Whales are more likely to become entangled with slack lines, which can potentially create a “floating snare”.

BUOY SET-UP BEST PRACTICES



Excess Slack Surface Line and Whale Entanglements

Ocean users, including members of the fishing community, are seeing a shift in fishing practices towards increased surface line and the use of multiple surface buoys. During a review of documented entanglements from recent years, fishermen, disentanglement responders, and others see a potential connection between slack surface line and the number of trailer buoys contributing to whale entanglements.

Efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of these voluntary recommendations in reducing the risk of whale entanglements will be made to inform future recommendations and/or management action. These best practices, together with investigating the co-occurrence (or overlap) between whale and fishing effort, are steps the Working Group is taking to address this challenging and complex issue.

For more information about the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group, including background materials, meeting summaries, and key resources like this Best Practices Guide, visit opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group.

Taking these important, proactive steps to voluntarily reduce slack surface line will help to provide continued opportunities to harvest crab and maintain the fleet's access to the resource.



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. If possible, stand by for responders.

Photographing Entangled Whales (>100 yards away)

WHALE: side view of dorsal fin (or hump); flukes (especially if underside is 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.

Respond Promptly if Contacted by NMFS or CDFW

If you are contacted by NMFS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), or any other government agency regarding a whale entangled in your gear please respond and provide as much information as possible about your fishing gear and practices. Gaining a better understanding of where, when, and how entanglements are occurring is essential in working to prevent entanglements in the future.

If you have suggestions for reducing entanglements in fishing gear, contact Dan Lawson, NMFS Protected Resources Division, at Dan.Lawson@noaa.gov or 562-980-3209.

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

