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Entanglement Settlement Protects Whales, Sea Turtles and California's Crab Fishery

SAN FRANCISCO — Californians will be pleased to know that Dungeness crab will be caught off the coast with greater care for endangered wildlife under a settlement announced by the Center for Biological Diversity, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA).

The legal settlement protects whales and sea turtles from entanglement in commercial Dungeness crab gear. The Center for Biological Diversity sued CDFW in October 2017 after a drastic increase in the number of whale entanglements off the West Coast.

"As I've said many times, no one wants whale entanglements to happen," said CDFW Director Charlton H. Bonham. "This agreement represents hours of intense negotiation to help ensure they don't happen while supporting the resiliency of the crab fishery in the long run. I am thankful for the leadership of the Center for Biological Diversity and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations who realized something needed to be done together."

"This is great news for whales and sea turtles fighting extinction off California's coast," said Kristen Monsell, a Center for Biological Diversity attorney. "The settlement will reduce serious threats from crab gear to these beautiful and highly endangered animals. This agreement is a turning point that gets us closer to zero entanglements and a healthy ocean."

The lawsuit was brought by the Center for Biological Diversity against CDFW (*Center for Biological Diversity v. Bonham*) in federal court in San Francisco. The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents crabbers, intervened in the lawsuit.

The settlement, subject to court approval, creates a comprehensive approach to the problem of whale entanglements. It expedites state regulation, ensures stakeholder input from the Dungeness crab Fishing Gear Working Group and formalizes a first-ever commitment by CDFW to pursue a federal permit for protecting endangered species. While these steps are executed, the settlement calls for this year's crab season to end three months early and prescribes protective measures for future springtime fishing seasons, when the greatest number of whales are present off the California coast.

In November 2018, [CDFW announced](#) it would seek a federal permit under the Endangered Species Act to address protected species interactions with the crab fishery.

Obtaining a permit and developing a conservation plan as part of that process can take years, so the settlement spells out interim protections.

“This settlement represents the path back to normality for California’s crab fishery with built-in protections for whales and crab fishing operations under the Endangered Species Act,” said Noah Oppenheim, executive director of PCFFA. “The past several years have been extraordinarily challenging for fishing families, and the actions we’re taking here are no exception. But in the end, we’re going to emerge together with a resilient, prosperous, and protective fishery that will continue to feed California and the nation.”

Details of the settlement can be found [here](#).

The mission of the Department of Fish and Wildlife is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations is the largest commercial fishermen’s organization on the West Coast, representing 17 local and regional associations from Santa Barbara to Southeast Alaska. As a major commercial fishing industry trade association, PCFFA represents the interests of commercial fishing families who make their living harvesting and delivering high-quality seafood to America’s tables.

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