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.

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 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. Whales are more likely to become entangled with slack lines, which can potentially create a “floating snare”.

- Remove all fishing gear by the end of the season when gear is no longer allowed in the water.

BUOY SET-UP BEST PRACTICES

SURFACE

- Main Buoy
- Trailer
- Total distance between the main and final trailer buoy

RECREATIONAL

- shortest as possible, max of 2 fathoms (12ft) at any depth

COMMERCIAL

- Inside 30 fathoms: shortest as possible, max of 3 fathoms (18ft)
- 30-50 fathoms: shortest as possible, max of 4 fathoms (24ft)
- Outside 50 fathoms: shortest as possible, max of 5 fathoms (30ft)

Minimize # of buoys in set up—no more than 1 trailer buoy inside 30 fathoms

Keep line between trap and main buoy running vertical and taut

1 fathom = 6 feet
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 a fact sheet, background materials, meeting summaries, recommendations memos, 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.
Reasons for Directives
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has confirmed significant increases in large whale entanglements over the last few years, and specifically in Dungeness crab fishing gear. This situation threatens the stability of the fishery and coastal fishing communities. By using these voluntary best practices, the Oregon Dungeness crab fleet can take an important step towards reducing the risk of whale entanglements.

The best known way to reduce risk of whale entanglement is to reduce the amount of gear and line in the water during the spring and summer months, when whales are in the area.

Best Practices During Crab Season
- Use the minimum amount of scope required to compensate for tides, currents and weather. Whales are more likely to become entangled with slack lines, which can potentially create a “floating snare”.
- When changing set location across depths, adjust the length of pot lines by adjusting shots (i.e., measured length of line) to maintain taut vertical lines.
- No excess lines should be floating at the surface. Floating line should only be between the main buoy and trailer buoy(s).
- Remove any fishing gear you are not actively tending during the season.
- Avoid setting gear in the vicinity of whales whenever possible.
- Communicate the locations of high whale activity with other fishermen.

Why Report?
Understanding where, when, and how entanglements occur is essential to prevent future entanglements. Timely reporting is critical to facilitate response efforts, when appropriate.

Report Entangled Whales
1-877-SOS-WHALe

Photograph Entangled Whales
- 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.
- Do not approach within 100 yards.

Respond Promptly if Contacted
If you are contacted about a whale entangled in your gear, please respond. You can help prevent future entanglements by providing as much information as possible about your fishing gear and practices.
Best Practices To Reduce And Recover Derelict Gear

- Maintain gear to ensure lines and buoys are in good working condition and clearly marked consistent with applicable regulation.

- Remove any derelict gear you encounter during the season, consistent with applicable regulation. For more information on Oregon’s in-season gear recovery program, contact Kelly Corbett at (541) 867 - 0300, ext 244. Lost gear contributes to marine debris and increases 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.

- Remove all fishing gear by the end of the season when gear is no longer allowed in the water.

- Consider participating in the permitted post-season derelict gear program after the season ends.

Taking these important, proactive steps will support consumer perceptions of the fleet’s sustainability, help to provide continued opportunities to harvest crab and maintain the fleet’s access to the resource.

If you have suggestions for reducing entanglements in fishing gear, contact:

Amanda Gladics at Oregon Sea Grant
Amanda.Gladics@oregonstate.edu
(503) 325-8573 ext. 265

The Best Practices Directive was developed by the Oregon Whale Entanglement Working Group

extension.oregonstate.edu/clatsop/oregon-whale-entanglement-working-group

NOAA MMHSRP Permit #: 18786
Washington Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishing

Recommended by the Washington Whale Entanglement Working Group*

Reasons for Directives
The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has confirmed significant increases in large whale entanglements over the last few years, and specifically in Dungeness crab fishing gear. This situation threatens the stability of the fishery and coastal fishing communities. By using these voluntary best practices, the Washington Dungeness crab fleet can take an important step towards reducing the risk of whale entanglements.

The best known way to reduce risk of whale entanglement is to reduce the amount of gear and line in the water during the spring and summer months, when whales are in the area.

Best Practices During Crab Season

Laws require you to remove any fishing gear you are not actively tending during the season and have all gear out of the water by the end of the season.

- Minimize scope. Use only the amount necessary to compensate for tides, currents and weather.

When changing set location across depths, adjust the length of pot lines by adjusting shots (i.e., measured length of line) to maintain the minimum amount of scope necessary to compensate for the currents and tides.

- Minimize excess line to avoid floating line at the surface. Floating line should be as limited as practical between the main buoy and trailer buoy(s).

- Minimize knots & splices which can get caught up in the baleen.

- Avoid setting gear in the vicinity of whales when possible.

- Communicate the locations of high whale activity with other fishermen.

Keep line between pot and main buoy running taut and as vertical as possible.

*Adapted from the best management directives of the Oregon Whale Entanglement Working Group

NOAA MMHSRP # 18786

WA Commercial Dungeness Crab Vessel photo by WDFW
**REPORT Entangled Whales IMMEDIATELY**
1-877-SOS-WHAle (1-877-767-9425) or hail the U.S. Coast Guard on Channel 16

☐ **DO Report** Immediate reporting is critical to give the best chance for response teams to remove life-threatening gear from the whale and gather information to understand where, when and how entanglements occur to prevent future ones. Preventing future entanglements will help preserve our fishery.

☐ **DO Stand By** If possible please stand by and keep sight of the whale. It is difficult and rare to relocate an entangled whale if a boat does not stay with the whale. Stay at least 100 yards away.

☐ **DO Photograph Entangled Whales** 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 or other gear (if present); other gear if present.

☐ **DO Respond Promptly if Contacted** If you are contacted about a whale entangled in your gear, please respond. You can help prevent future entanglements by providing as much information as possible about your fishing gear and practices.

☒ **DO NOT ATTEMPT** to disentangle the whale Removing the easily accessible lines at the surface will leave the life-threatening lines attached to the whale and may make it impossible for responders to detect and remove these. Entangled whales are very rarely in immediate danger of drowning.

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**Other Things You Can Do To Help**

- **Keep Gear Well Marked** 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.

- **Help Recover Lost Or Untended Gear** Obtain a free permit and help with the post-season derelict gear removal program. Any lost and untended gear contributes to marine debris and increases risk of whale entanglements.

- **Help Spread The Word** Help educate the rest of the fleet about best practices and the importance of reporting, standing by, photographing, and not trying to cut off entangling gear.

By taking these steps you will help protect whales from entanglements. You will also be helping to protect the Dungeness crab fishery and your ability to continue to harvest crab. All of us can help assure the fleet’s good reputation and sustainability.

If you have questions or suggestions for reducing entanglements in fishing gear, please contact:

- **Dan Ayres** • WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
  (360) 249-1209
daniel.ayres@dfw.wa.gov

- **Scott Mazzone**
  Quinault Indian Nation
  (360) 276-8215 ext. 7576
  smazzzone@quinault.org

- **Jennifer Hagen**
  Quileute Tribe
  (360) 374-2059
  jennifer.hagen@quileutetribe.com

- **Joe Petersen**
  Makah Tribe
  (360) 645-3157
  makah.groundfish@gmail.com

- **For the Puget Sound Tribes**
  Sandy Zeiner • NW Indian Fisheries Commission
  (360) 528-4370
  szeiner@nwifc.org

- **Fran Recht** • Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
  (541) 765-2229
  frecht@psmfc.org

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*Photo by Doug Sandilands*