

July 19, 2018 Ropeless Fishing Gear Planning Meeting - Summary

Background: On May 31, 2018, four members of the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Kelly Sayce, Dan Lawson, Dick Ogg, and Geoff Shester) gave a panel presentation to the Marine Mammal Commission on our efforts and projects thus far, including the April/May 2018 initial trials and experience with ropeless fishing gear systems off Central California described above. As a result, the Commission expressed interest in efforts to further explore these new technologies in the context of current west coast fishing operations. In this light, on July 19, Dr. Frances Gulland, one of the Commissioners, hosted an informal meeting with Commission and agency staff, gear manufacturers, and fishermen interested in trying out the gear.

Meeting Participants: Marine Mammal Commission staff (Commissioner Frances Gulland, Executive Director Peter Thomas, Dennis Heinemann (remote), Brady O'Donnell); Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group Members (Jim Anderson, John Mellor, Dick Ogg, Geoff Shester (Oceana)); Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (Noah Oppenheim); Gear Manufacturers (SMELTS Inflatable Bag System: Richard Riels; Desert Star: Christian Aparecio, Marco Flagg, Jake Wolf; Fiomarine: John Fiotakis); CDFW (Bob Puccinelli, Joanna Grebel (remote)); Ocean Protection Council (Paige Berube (remote)); New England Aquarium (Tim Werner (remote)); Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (Mark Baumgartner (remote)).



Meeting Goals: The goals of the meeting were to share information on three currently available ropeless systems, discuss fishermen perspectives, and develop a plan to have several fishermen test a few of the current ropeless systems in the coming fishing 2018-19 season, including to identify the costs, permits, and funding necessary. We were also able to have an initial conversation on management and enforcement needs and considerations, which provided useful information to gear manufacturers for further innovation.

Key Outcomes: There was general agreement that there is promise and value in further exploring ropeless fishing gear in the West Coast Dungeness crab fishery, as part of a broader strategy to reduce whale entanglements. The key objectives for the coming fishing season are to provide multiple fishermen an opportunity to experiment with different systems and boat configurations, and further demonstrate whether the ropeless concept can actually work for the Dungeness crab fishery. Gear manufacturers offered to provide test units to fishermen next season, and fishermen voiced their willingness to participate in trials, with the goal of initiating the next round of trials in April 2019-June 2019. We hope to solicit additional fishing participants in the 2019 trials through the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group.

Regarding permitting, there is no need to acquire any additional research permits for testing ropeless gear provided each trap is equipped with a traditional line and buoy in addition to the ropeless system,

and gear is fished legally within the Dungeness crab season. However, an experimental gear permit and/or Sanctuary research permit would be required to conduct trials with multiple traps attached to a single buoy, outside the Dungeness crab season, or without a buoy to mark the gear location. Given the interest in examining multiple traps per system, particularly for larger crab vessels, it may be necessary to initiate the process of requesting experimental gear permits from the California Fish and Game Commission.

Members of the East Coast “Ropeless Consortium” from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the New England Aquarium participated remotely to provide feedback and advice from their experiences testing and developing ropeless fishing systems in East Coast lobster and crab fisheries to reduce entanglements of endangered North Atlantic right whales. Continued communication and collaboration with these efforts will be important as we move forward.

We discussed the following general outline of the goals for the 2019 testing including:

- Work with 5-10 fishermen that fish at a variety of depths, locations, conditions, and vessel types
- Test 3 types of existing ropeless systems, using readily available prototypes to keep costs down
- Deploy up to 10 units of gear of each system
- Attempt single and multiple traps per unit
- Allow fishermen to work with each system for several weeks to try different techniques, configurations, and adjustments.
- Gather feedback from fishermen, foster interaction with gear developers.
- Compensate fishermen and gear developers for time, travel, shipping costs, and other costs associated with gear trials.
- Explore potential funding through various sources including the Marine Mammal Commission, California Ocean Protection Council, and others.

Acknowledgments: Thank you to the fishermen Dick Ogg, Jim Anderson, Calder Deyerle, and John Mellor who voluntarily took time off from fishing without pay to participate in the gear trials, provide your experiences in writing, and/or attend the planning meeting. Your dedication to solving the whale entanglement issue is recognized and sincerely appreciated. Thank you to Commissioner Frances Gulland and the Marine Mammal Commission staff for hosting and organizing the July 19 meeting and for inviting us to present at the May 31 annual meeting. Thank you to Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Staff Karen Grimmer and Sophie Debeukelaer for helping obtain necessary permits for the initial trials. Thank you to gear manufacturers at Desert Star, Fiomarine, and SMELTS for traveling to attend the meeting and gear trials and for lending your equipment and expertise. Thank you to Bob Puccinelli from CDFW for providing a helpful overview of enforcement needs and providing constructive feedback as we explore this new gear. Thank you to Fran Recht and Robert Morgan (WDFW) for your helpful insights and feedback during the Bodega Bay gear trials.