

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
95814

February 7, 2020

Mr. Chuck Bonham
Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Draft Proposed Regulations for the Dungeness Crab Fishery

Dear Director Bonham:

We write to you as the elected representatives of California commercial fishermen, the communities in which they live, and the seafood lovers for whom they risk their lives to provide local, sustainable Dungeness crab. The hard working men and women of California's fishing fleet provide hundreds of millions of dollars of economic productivity to our state and thousands of family sustaining jobs.

Thanks to collaborative efforts between this Legislature, fishery co-managers, and your agency, Dungeness crab is a productive and sustainable ocean resource, comprising the most valuable fishery in our state. Crab fishing forms the economic backbone of the ports for Northern and Central California and, together with salmon and groundfish, forms the 'three-legged stool' of small-scale fisheries in mostly rural and small communities up and down our state's coast.

We are all familiar with the marine heat wave of 2014-16 that brought fishing gear and whales together in a tragic but atypical 'perfect storm', resulting in a spike of whale entanglements during the spring of 2016. While there were 22 entanglements during the 2015-16 season confirmed in California Dungeness crab fishing gear, in subsequent seasons the fishing industry has aggressively implemented a series of preventive measures and worked with your agency to adopt processes that have dramatically reduced whale entanglements. These improvements have had tangible results and should be commended, while recognizing that more work is needed.

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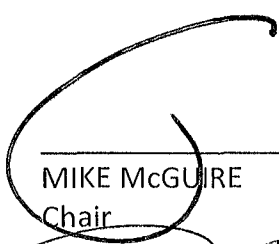
The fishing industry is deeply concerned about the approach the Department of Fish and Wildlife is taking to develop its Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP). We have been made aware of the proposed regulations that have been drafted by the department in an attempt to partially achieve compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act. We are concerned that this draft proposal could cause irreparable harm to the hard working men and women who harvest, process, sell and prepare fresh California crab. The proposal substantially deviates from your California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group recommendations and not only do we have concerns, we are perplexed on why you seem to ignore their data driven recommendations.

We believe there is a better approach that can balance protections for California's beloved whale population and ensure the Golden State's fishing fleet can thrive for years to come.

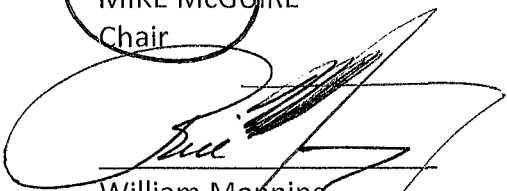
We believe that a more appropriate solution, one that complies with state and federal law, exists such that the RAMP regulations proposal currently under development by your agency do not unduly restrict the operation of the fishery.

We respectfully request that you meet with leaders of the affected stakeholders and the Chair of the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture to discuss these critical issues. We believe Department staff needs to move immediately to work closely with the industry to ensure that future iterations of this regulatory proposal are fair, flexible and include adaptive approaches necessary in this complex situation. We urge you to thoroughly consider and respond to their suggested changes. Thank you for your consideration of this request, we look forward to your response.

Warmest Regards,



MIKE McGUIRE
Chair



William Monning
Senator



Jim Wood
Assemblymember



Jim Nielsen
Senator



Megan Dahle
Assemblymember



Jerry Hill
Senator