



PRESS RELEASE

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Photos available upon request

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Monterey Bay fishermen leave no crab pot behind

Monterey, CA — For the fifth consecutive year, the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust is partnering with the fishing community and local harbors to find and remove lost Dungeness crab gear from Monterey Bay through the Lost Gear Recovery program. While crab fishermen regularly pick up derelict fishing gear throughout the season, this program adds an additional layer of vigilance to ensure that no commercial crab pot is left in the ocean after the season comes to an end.

“It’s about doing the right thing — that’s how I was raised,” says Scott Rouhier, a Moss Landing fisherman and member of the Recovery Team. “Some people go to beach cleanups, but as a fisherman, I take that to the water.”

The Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust first launched the Lost Gear Recovery Project with local fishermen in 2017, and last year the state of California established a new permit program to remove gear left in the water. The Trust has secured a permit and is partnering with nine commercial fishermen out of Monterey, Moss Landing, and Santa Cruz.

These programs come on the heels of an increase in reported whale entanglements in fishing gear in 2015 and 2016 that created negative press for fishermen and put both the state and, by extension, California crabbers in the crosshairs of legal action. The increase has since been primarily attributed to climate-related ocean phenomena, including the [warm water blob that changed whale migration patterns](#).

To reduce the potential of entanglements, fishermen responded by developing best practices of how to rig and set gear in ways that dramatically reduce entanglement risk. They also worked with other stakeholders to form the [California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group](#)

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that has been taking steps to actively identify and respond to risks of whale entanglements. Additionally, crabbers are now working under new Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) regulations that the state of California instituted in November. Under RAMP, the State has several potential management responses to choose from when an elevated risk of entanglement exists. As a result of all these actions, the number of whale entanglements has dramatically declined, with no reported entanglements during the past season.

“Fishermen have always been motivated to remove lost gear from the Bay, from an environmental, safety, and cost perspective,” says Sherry Flumerfelt, the executive director of the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust. “We’re fortunate to have such a dedicated group of fishermen on the project this year and thankful for the support of the harbors and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.”

Dungeness crab gear is expensive and time-consuming to rig, so fishermen do their best to keep track of their crab pots. A giant mass of bull kelp can move pots into deeper water, boats can run over gear and pull the pots far away, and stormy seas can significantly shift the positioning of pots.

“No fisherman wants to negatively affect the environment,” says Rouhier, who has been commercial fishing for 15 years. “Some people look at us like a gruff group that doesn’t care about anything, but that couldn’t be further from the case. We chose to make our living on the water, so we know more than anyone the importance of taking care of it.”

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The Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust (MBFT) is a nonprofit working to ensure that Monterey Bay’s coastal communities benefit from active, working waterfronts and local, sustainable seafood for generations to come. To learn more about MBFT, visit <https://montereybayfisheritrust.org/>.