

Oregon Whale Entanglement Working Group Meeting Summary

Thursday, May 25, 2017, 10am-2pm

*Location: Englund Marine and Industrial Supply Conference Room
880 S.E. Bay Blvd., Newport, OR 97103*

This summary has been reviewed by members of the Oregon working group participants for accuracy, and is final and can be made publicly available.

This meeting was the first meeting of the newly convened working group on whale entanglement in Oregon. The group was convened by Oregon Sea Grant to develop strategies for reducing the risk of whale entanglements in trap and pot fishing gear off Oregon. The group includes representatives of commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fishing, marine mammal researchers, state fisheries managers, and conservation NGOs interested in whale populations. A list of members can be found at the end of this document.

The following summary captures key themes discussed by the Working Group during the May 25, 2017 meeting; it should not to be considered a transcript. Oregon Sea Grant facilitators will make all efforts to capture the prevailing sentiment within the working group, as well as dissenting perspectives. Working Group next steps are captured throughout the document (blue). Short-term next steps that should occur before the next scheduled working group meeting will be captured in a separate 'Next Steps' section at the end of the summary document. Once final, these summaries will be distributed to all working group participants, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This summary will also be shared with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Oregon Coastal Caucus, other leadership and other interested parties throughout Oregon.

Oregon Sea Grant facilitators will develop summaries following all Working Group meetings, which are designed to provide Working Group participants with information to share and discuss with their peers, as well as inform ongoing discussions within the Working Group itself. Additionally, these summaries will act as a source of information for other stakeholders interested in this topic. Meeting agendas, summaries, and other information about the Working Group will be available at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/clatsop/oregon-whale-entanglement-working-group>.

Meeting goals:

- Convene the group and establish ground rules, decision-making processes.
- Establish goals for working group, and begin to map out the work plan to achieve them.
- Prioritize information needs to address in subsequent meetings to inform the working group's efforts

Welcome and Introductions

Meeting hosted by Oregon Sea Grant

All working group members and visitors introduced themselves, provided information about their affiliation and role.

Process Decisions

Review and revise agenda. Review, revise and affirm ground rules and determine group decision making process.

No formal changes were made to the agenda. However, the discussion veered away from the original agenda to focus more on working group goals and intended activities. The proposed groundrules were reviewed, discussed, and ultimately adopted with the addition of a groundrule that participants would seek input and communicate about the work of the group with their respective communities. The full list of groundrules is included at the end of this document.

The group made a number of process decisions:

- The group will have a maximum of 20 members
- [The Oregon Sea Grant will seek additional representation of small vessel commercial crabbers, with the assistance of current group members.](#)
- Meetings will be open to the public. However, group members will have priority to participate in the discussion. Public comment will be limited to a set time period at the end of the meeting. All visitors will be asked to introduce themselves and provide information about their affiliation when they arrive.
- The group will aim to hold half-day meetings, approximately every 6 weeks through the end of the 2017 calendar year.

There was a discussion but no final decision about how the group would finalize decisions regarding recommendations. The group concluded that they would aim to achieve consensus, but also wanted options to make recommendations even if a full consensus could not be reached.

- Some members of the group felt that a simple majority would be preferred, while others advocated for a super-majority of either 60% or 2/3rds.
- There was no clear agreement from group members on the issue of how many group members would constitute a quorum.
- One approach used in other groups is that the percentage of group members that form a quorum is the same as majority that carried a vote, e.g. 50% of members form a quorum, and 50% of members present to vote can carry an issue.
- [We ran out of time for full discussion and conclusion on that issue, and intend to address this at the next working group meeting.](#)

Goal Setting: Overall Working Group Goals

Initial discussion of what the working group wants to accomplish.

During introductions, working group members shared some of their motivations for joining the working group. We followed with a discussion of what members thought were appropriate goals for the working group as a whole. Key goals included:

- Understand the problem sufficiently to work toward solutions
- Model stewardship and responsibility for the rest of the fleet.
- Improve the image of the fishery to the public, particularly from a seafood marketing perspective.
- Approach potential solutions with an attitude of “What’s best for the whales is best for the industry”.
- The working group should strive to serve as a liaison between NOAA and the fleet.
- Develop solutions that are likely to reduce the risk of whale entanglement.

Brainstorm: Potential Working Group Actions

Initial discussion of potential avenues for the working group to take action, toward the goal of reducing whale entanglement risk off Oregon.

The group discussed ideas for potential avenues for action. The ideas generally fell into the following categories: 1) Communication and Coordination, 2) Whale Disentanglement Initiatives, 3) Lost and Derelict Gear Initiatives, 4) Gear Modification Development and Testing, and 5) Addressing Vertical Lines

Communication and Coordination

In keeping with the stated goal of the working group serving as a liaison between NOAA and the fleet, group members had extensive input on potential avenues to increase the communication and coordination around the whale entanglement issue. The group identified the following potential actions:

- Foster a better relationship between the fleet(s) and NOAA Fisheries, with the aim of encouraging increased and better reporting of whale entanglements. The group identified newsletters, ODFW meetings and/or workshops, and handouts for recreational fishermen as some avenues to communicate with the fleet about reporting
- Organize a whale experts and fishermen exchange, potentially focused on entanglement gear identification, with a broader group of fishermen to improve understanding across both groups about the issue.
- Support a focused group of fishermen to assist NOAA to attempt to identifying gear on entangled whales that NOAA has been unable to positively identify a source fishery.
- Gain a better understanding of NOAA’s practices and procedures for counting (or not) entangled and disentangled whales as dead or seriously injured. The group wanted clarity on what kind of entanglement counted as a probable mortality, as well as how partial disentanglements were handled in the biological stock assessment process. [Oregon Sea Grant will request to have Dan Lawson \(NOAA Fisheries\) or Lauren Saez \(Ocean Associates\) present to the group on this topic at a future meeting.](#)
- Continue to receive updates on continuing research that was included in the March workshop and from the California Dungeness Crab Gear Working Group. [Oregon Sea](#)

Grant will continue to attend California working group meetings, and will seek agreement from the organizers of that group to allow one or more Oregon fishermen attend as well.

- Develop a strategy for dissemination of Working Group progress and recommendations. Potential audiences included port samplers, and potential strategies included workshops in ports along the coast, and a newsletter. Oregon Sea Grant will take the lead on developing this strategy, with input from group members.

Whale Disentanglement Initiatives

The group was interested in improving whale disentanglement efforts in Oregon, while acknowledging that preventing entanglement in the first place was a more effective method of solving the problem. Some potential avenues to increase the success of disentanglement efforts included:

- Coordination with Coast Guard to find and document entangled whales. The group is interested in finding out if Coast Guard resources could be used to re-sight previously observed, but not fully documented entanglements. Oregon Sea Grant will follow up with Coast Guard to explore if they could note, document and report entangled whales during their routine training activities
- Training for fishermen and other motivated stakeholders to conduct disentanglement operations. Oregon Sea Grant will continue to advocate for training opportunities through official NOAA channels and from marine wildlife veterinary experts.
- Leverage the observational power of the recreational fleet to detect entangled whales by conducting targeted outreach to recreational fishermen on how to report. Potential communication channels include 1) in ODFW regulation handbook and tags, and 2) at launch sites.

Lost/Derelict Gear Initiatives

The working group expressed interest in looking for opportunities to reduce lost gear and clean up derelict/lost gear. This arena included prevention of lost gear, tracking lost and derelict gear to facilitate better clean-up and/or removal, and developing methods for more efficient removal of stuck gear. The group identified a few important potential avenues for action:

- Develop proposals to improve Oregon's derelict gear removal program. Working group members expressed that Oregon can look to see what we can learn from the newly developed California program, which has a set price per pot and requires fishermen to pay for their lost pots before they can receive their permit to fish the following season. The group felt that while Oregon's program had some distinct advantages compared to the approach California has taken, we might be able to incentivize the cleanup of gear that is not salvageable by borrowing elements of the California system.
- The group was also interested in exploring whether a workaround might be possible to allow vessels to pick up derelict gear inside the RCA while on a groundfish trip. Group members explained that a change to VMS rules and the groundfish rule regarding escape panels would be required, which needs to be addressed at the Pacific Fisheries Management Council level.

Gear modification testing and development

Working group members expressed that they were interested in exploring potential gear modification ideas to reduce the risk of whale entanglement. The group did not discuss any specific gear modification ideas, but hopes to take up this potential avenue for action at a future meeting. There was also interest within the group in reviewing the best practices guide that California's working group put together as a starting point for an Oregon best practices guide. Based on information that group members learned at the March PSMFC workshop, there was also concern that gear modifications alone would not be sufficient to solve the problem of whale entanglements.

Address vertical lines in the water

Some group members alluded to the need to address the vertical lines in the water, but the group did not discuss any specific proposals. [The working group will take this topic up at a subsequent meeting.](#)

Working Lunch

Report from California Group Meeting, May 16-17, 2017 and discussion

Amanda Gladics provided a report from the California Dungeness Crab Gear Working Group meeting. Once finalized, complete summary notes of that meeting will be available at <http://www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group/>. Key discussions and outcomes included:

- The group generally agreed on the need for a management framework (Whale Hazard Assessment Team, or WHAT framework) with a scoring system that initiates further discussion & management decisions and actions with a more nimble 'hotshot' team. While composition of the hotshot team remained uncertain, it will likely be a subset of the members of the working group.
- Jarrod Santora (NOAA Fisheries/SWFSC) made significant progress in modeling the relationship between foraging ocean conditions and distribution of krill and anchovy in the central California region. The discussion of the working group shifted toward being able to proactively predict and manage risk before the season starts and before whales arrive. Advance notice based on winter re-conditioning in February can predict June-July krill and anchovy distribution, which presumably can indicate humpback whale distribution. The group committed an additional \$30,000 toward expanding the geographic scope of the model to the entire California coast and linking forage species distribution to whale distribution.
- Working group members shared the results of pilot testing of e-reporting and logbooks in the California Dungeness crab fleet. The working group decided that it was worth continuing to test both the eCatch and Solar Logger reporting systems. They plan to expand testing to 10-20 vessels using a sampling design that will allow for assessment of the spatial distribution of fishing effort at the end of next season.

Brainstorm and Prioritize: Information Needs

What does the working group need to know in order to evaluate these potential solutions? What information needs are the highest priority? Who or what resources can the group access to help fill these gaps?

The working group identified information needs during their discussion of working group goals and potential activities.

- A better understanding of whale behavior, as well as more information about where whale entanglement is occurring, rather than just where it was being reported would inform potential approaches to reduce entanglement risk
- Working group members identified that understanding the exact mechanisms by which whales are getting entangled would be very useful to know. However, this information would be very difficult to obtain based on what researchers currently know.
- Some members of the group expressed interest in exploring whether and how recreational fishermen's observation of whales might augment other data sources on whale distribution. Participants acknowledged that this may not be the most efficient way to collect whale distribution data.
- The group also expressed interest in learning more about possible interaction between whale entanglements and other anthropogenic and natural stressors such as underwater noise from Navy activities, and elevated domoic acid.
- The group also is interested in identifying areas where federal fisheries management rules limit state fisheries management options, to inform discussions about what management options are possible.

During our conversation about information needs, Jim Rice shared some information about about recent changes in whale distributions off Oregon. In recent years, researchers have observed Humpbacks closer to shore and in unusual areas like inside the Columbia River, and close to shore near Depoe Bay. Additionally, more blue and minke whales have been observed off Oregon recently. Rice also shared that gray whales are well studied in Oregon. The resident gray whales spend long periods on specific prey patches, but those patches are not in consistent locations. There is also a possible attraction to microhabitat around fixed gear, like crab pots, which may attract mysids, one of gray whale's primary prey species.

Wrap up and Next Steps

Outline action items and responsible group members for any interim efforts, determine priority discussion topics for next meeting.

[Oregon Sea Grant will be responsible for generating meeting summaries following each working group meeting. These will be circulated to group members for input before being made public.](#)

The group requests notification from NOAA Fisheries when entanglements happen off the Oregon Coast. [Oregon Sea Grant will communicate this request to NOAA Fisheries and follow up to ensure such notification is provided.](#)

The group is interested in establishing coordination with the Coast Guard on detecting and documenting whale entanglements. [Oregon Sea Grant will initiate contact with the Coast Guard to determine what might be possible, and report back to the group.](#)

The group needs additional representation from commercial fishermen who fish using smaller vessels. [Oregon Sea Grant will recruit small boat fishermen to join the working group, with the assistance of group members.](#)

Meeting Participants

Name	Affiliation
Susan Chambers	West Coast Seafood Processors Association
Kelly Corbett	ODFW Commercial Dungeness Crab
John Corbin	Commercial Fisherman - Astoria
Bob Eder	Commercial Fisherman - Newport
Sheila Garber	Englund Marine & Industrial Supply
Gway Kirchner	The Nature Conservancy
Mike Lane	Commercial Fisherman - Coos Bay
Rick Lilienthal	Commercial Fisherman - Coos Bay
Hugh Link	Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission
Ron Mason	Recreational Crabber - Corvallis/Newport
Tony Pettis	Commercial Fisherman - Newport
Jim Rice	OSU, Marine Mammal Institute
Sarah Skamsar	Foulweather Trawl
Justin Yager	Commercial Fisherman - Newport
Oregon Sea Grant	
Amanda Gladics	Facilitator
Kaety Jacobson	Co-Facilitator

Working Group Participants Unable to Attend

Name	Affiliation
Leigh Torres	OSU, Marine Mammal Institute
Joy Primrose	OR Chapter American Cetacean Society
Stuart Schuttpelz	Commercial Fisherman - Reedsport
Deb Duffield	PSU, Marine Mammal Researcher

Groundrules

Last edited 6/9/2017 by A. Gladics, based on group input on 5/25/2017

1. Focus on interests and ideas, not positions or single solutions to the problem.
2. Respect different viewpoints. Speak honestly and disagree without being disagreeable.
3. Share the airtime. Everyone participate, no one dominate. One speaker at a time.
4. Listen to understand, and ask questions. Look for common solutions.
5. Come prepared to meaningfully contribute to meetings.
6. Respect the confidentiality of sensitive information shared within the group.
7. When speaking with the press, discuss your own beliefs. Refrain from presenting the views of others or speaking on behalf of the group before a decision has been reached.
8. Group members will seek input from their local community to bring to the group and communicate with others in the wider community about the work of the group
9. Everyone shares responsibility for following the ground rules.