



California Department of Fish and Wildlife Final Assessment of Marine Life Entanglement Risk and Management Recommendation

Date: February 17, 2021

An initial assessment and preliminary recommendation was developed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region staff for consideration by the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) for the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP; Section 132.8, Title 14, California Code of Regulations) regarding Management Actions to address marine life entanglement risk in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery. The initial assessment was shared with the Working Group on February 12, 2021 and finalized at the conclusion of the Working Group meeting on February 17, 2021 based on discussions with the group.

A. Marine life entanglement risk, relative to the triggers in subsection (c)

Confirmed Entanglements in California Commercial Dungeness Crab Gear

- During the current Fishing Season: 0
- During the current calendar year: 0

Confirmed Entanglements in Unknown Fishing Gear reported from California:

- During the current Fishing Season: 0
- During the current calendar year: 0

Marine Life Concentrations Surveys and/or Satellite Telemetry Observations:

- Fishing Zones 1-7: No Triggers reached

B. Scope of elevated risk based on Management Considerations in subsection (d)

Section 132.8(d)(2): Information from NOAA

- No additional information was made available for this risk assessment.

Section 132.8(d)(3): Effectiveness of management measures to reduce entanglement risk

- No management measure(s) recommended under this initial assessment.

Section 132.8(d)(4): Total economic impact to the fleet and fishing communities

- No additional information was made available for this risk assessment and no management measure(s) were recommended for this initial assessment.

Section 132.8(d)(5): Data availability within and across Fishing Zones

- Monterey Bay Whale Watch (MBWW) data was available for Fishing Zone 4. Additional observational data were contributed for Fishing Zones 3, 4 and 6 and Blue whale habitat predictions are available for all Fishing Zones.

Section 132.8(d)(6): Known historic marine life migration patterns

- Absence of Humpback whales is consistent with average historical winter-time patterns that show few or no Humpback whale sightings during January and early February when whales are mostly at their breeding areas off Mexico and Central America.
- A recent NOAA funded photo ID project at the breeding grounds off Mexico and Central America showed high numbers of Humpback whales with no indication of departures or declines from those breeding areas.
- Absence of Blue whales is consistent with their known southward migration to breeding areas during winter.

Section 132.8(d)(7): Fishing Season dynamics

- Season price negotiations delayed actual start of fishing following the December 23, 2020 statewide opener. Most vessels began setting gear on Monday January 11, 2021.
- Based on CDFW landings data, 331 vessels have participated in the fishery as of February 2, 2021. Week 5 had the highest number of potential traps deployed across all Fishing Zones, with an estimated total of 94,250 traps. Fishing Zone 3 had the highest total, followed by Zone 1.

Section 132.8(d)(8): Known distribution and abundance of key forage

- No additional data was made available for this risk assessment.

Section 132.8(d)(9): Ocean conditions

- La Niña conditions persisted in January with a 60% chance of a transition from this condition to ENSO-neutral in the northern hemisphere by the spring months of April, May and June.
- See [Available Data](#) from December 10, 2020.

Section 132.8(d)(10): Current Impact Score Calculation

- Impact score calculation under RAMP began on January 1, 2021. Current impact score is 0 for all three species.

Section 132.8(d)(11): Actionable Species migration into or out of Fishing Grounds and across Fishing Zones

- Based on previous aerial survey work and MBWW data, the bulk of the migration appears to have occurred out of the Fishing Grounds.

C. Recommended Management Action from options identified in subsection (e)

Fishing Zones 1-6: CDFW Marine Region staff's final recommendation is that no Management Action is required in any of the Fishing Zones (1-6). Based on prior CDFW aerial survey data and as indicated by Monterey Bay Whale Watch data, Actionable Species appear to have migrated out of the Fishing Grounds. As a result, co-occurrence of commercial Dungeness crab trap gear and Humpback whales, Blue whales and Leatherback sea turtles is expected to be very low, which results in lowered entanglement risk. CDFW continues to encourage the fleet to implement fishing best practices (e.g. by minimizing knots and line scope) and to review the [Best Practices Guide](#) during the season and when moving gear to new Fishing Grounds.

CDFW Marine Region shared the Initial assessment with Working Group representatives and advisors on February 17, 2021. There was no opposition to the recommendation by Marine Region staff.

CDFW will continue to monitor all available data to inform the next risk assessment (expected to occur on or around March 15, 2021).

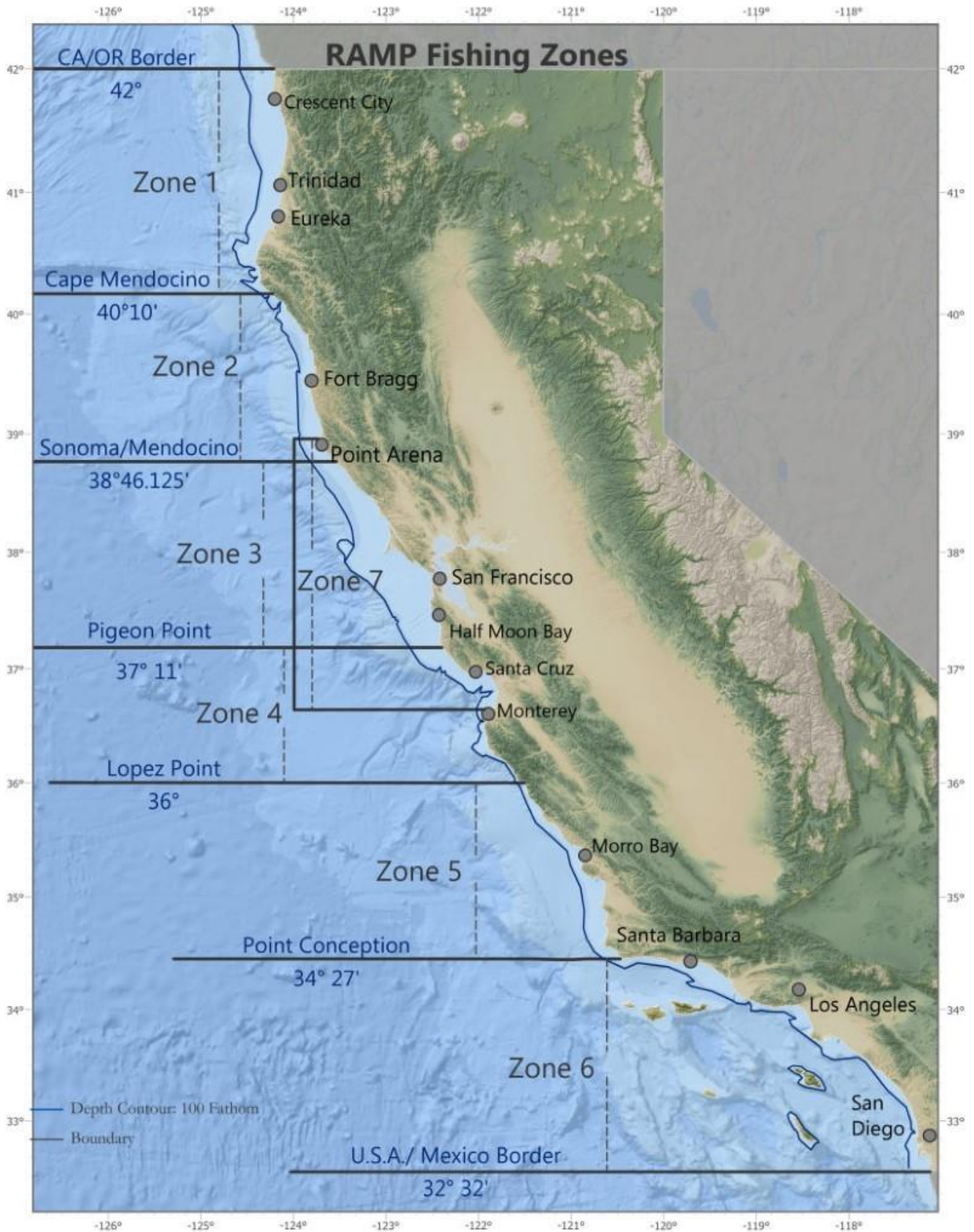


Figure 1. RAMP Fishing Zone boundaries.