



California Department of Fish and Wildlife Initial Assessment and Management Recommendation for the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Date: December 6, 2022

This initial assessment and management preliminary recommendation has been developed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region staff for consideration by the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear 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 and recreational Dungeness crab fishery. CDFW will prepare a Final Assessment and Management Recommendation after review of the Working Group Recommendation and other relevant data.

A. Confirmed Entanglements and Marine Life Concentrations Triggers for Management Action, RAMP subsection (c)

In-season Confirmed Entanglement accounting is not available because the fishery is not currently open. The current Impact Score for calendar year 2022 is 4.15 for humpback whales. The Impact Score for calendar year 2021 was 1.89 for humpback whales, as a result CDFW anticipates a running 3-year average Impact Score of at least 2.01 for humpback whales at the start of 2023.

- Confirmed Entanglements in California Commercial Dungeness Crab Gear during the current calendar year equal three humpback whales.
- Confirmed Entanglements in Unknown Fishing Gear reported from California during the current calendar year equal eight humpback whales (three additional entanglements are under review).

Marine Life Concentrations Surveys for Fishing Zones 3 and 4 documented aggregations of humpback whales. Marine Life Concentration triggers for each Fishing Zone based on individual surveys and whale watch data are as follows:

- Fishing Zone 3 = 49 and 80 humpback whales
- Fishing Zone 4 = 33, 59 and 64 humpback whales and weekly average sightings was 8.9 humpback whales

Fishing Zone 5 had 15 humpback whales observed and Zone 6 had no data available. Fishing Zones 1 and 2 were evaluated during the last risk assessment under RAMP. CDFW [Marine Region staff's final recommendation](#) for the commercial fishery was to allow the season to open in these Zones due to reduced entanglement risk. However, the commercial fishery opener in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 was further delayed pursuant to

Fish and Game Code Section 8672.2 due to quality testing results until at least Dec 16, 2022.

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

Recreational Fishery:

- **Crab Trap Prohibition (continued): Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6**

Commercial Fishery:

- **Season Delay (continued): Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6**

Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5, and 6

CDFW Marine Region staff's preliminary recommendation for Fishing Zones 3 through 6 is continuation of the season delay for the commercial fishery and recreational crab trap prohibition until the next risk assessment (expected to occur on or before Dec. 22 to inform a Dec. 31, 2022, opener). This recommendation is based on exceedance of Marine Life Concentration data triggers for humpback whales in Fishing Zones 3 and 4, potential for whale migration across Zone 5, and current entanglement impact score. No data were available in Fishing Zone 6.

Aerial surveys and vessel surveys indicated large aggregations of humpback whales in Fishing Zone 3 and 4. Monterey Bay Whale Watch data (standardized by NOAA) indicate above average sightings in Fishing Zone 4. Foraging activity by humpback whales poses a risk of entanglement with vertical lines and surface gear from recreational and commercial crab traps. In addition, given the current calendar year entanglement Impact Score, a precautionary management approach is warranted to further minimize entanglement risk until a majority of the whales have migrated out of or across these remaining Fishing Zones.

C. Alternative Management Actions considered from options identified in subsection (e)

- a. Fleet Advisory – will not provide any reduction in entanglement risk given the number of whales observed.
- b. Depth restriction – will not sufficiently provide protections due to distribution of humpback whales across all depths.
- c. Gear Reductions – any trap gear/lines in the water pose a risk to entanglement and given the anticipated high fishing effort for the season opener, it is not possible to identify an adequate reduction of traps for each trap tier to reduce risk.
- d. Alternative Gear - can only be authorized after April 1st.

