



California Department of Fish and Wildlife Final Assessment of Marine Life Entanglement Risk and Management Recommendation for the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Date: February 15, 2024

An initial assessment and a preliminary recommendation were developed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Marine Region 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 as well as Section 29.80, Title 14, California Code of Regulations (Gear Restrictions for Recreational Take of Saltwater Crustaceans). The initial assessment was shared with the Working Group on February 9, 2024, and finalized at the conclusion of the Working Group meeting which was held on February 13, 2024. For a map of the RAMP Fishing Zones, see the [Whale Safe Fisheries webpage](#).

I. Recommended Management Actions

Commercial Fishery:

- Continue 50% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6
- Continue Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones

Recreational Fishery:

- Continue Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones

Table 1. Fishing Zones and current management status for the California commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries.

Fishing Zone	Commercial Fishery: Current Management Status	Commercial Fishery: Proposed Management Status	Recreational Fishery: Current Management Status	Recreational Fishery: Proposed Management Status
1	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
2	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
3	Season Open with 50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
4	Season Open with 50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
5	Season Open with 50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
6	Season Open with 50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory

II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

Entanglements: No new entanglements have been reported since the last Risk Assessment on January 11, 2024. Confirmed humpback whale entanglements in California commercial Dungeness crab fishing gear and Unknown Fishing Gear bring the three-year rolling average Impact Score to 3.39. Additionally, the three-year rolling average Impact Score for leatherback sea turtles is 0.33. For more information, please see the [RAMP Entanglement History](#) document.

Marine Life Concentrations: No Marine Life Concentration surveys were conducted during the survey window due to severe weather. Monterey Bay Whale Watch documented no humpback whales during the last seven days (January 24-30, 2024). The semi-monthly average number of whales-per-half-

day-trip in southern Monterey Bay for January 2024 is similar to 2023 and the historical average for this time period. Recent leatherback turtle telemetry data documented a tagged female 500km southwest of Point Conception, CA heading in an ENE direction towards the coast of southern California or northern Baja California. Although the turtle is currently well outside Fishing Zones, the speed of travel has been relatively rapid, indicating the turtle could move into southern California waters within the next 2-4 weeks.

Marine Region's final recommendation is for the Director to continue the current Management Actions for both the commercial and recreational fisheries, including the continuation of the 50% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6 for the commercial fishery and continuation of the Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones in both fisheries. No Marine Life Concentration triggers were met for Actionable Species under RAMP; humpback whale sightings are at seasonal lows as whales have migrated to their southern breeding grounds. The leatherback turtle will be closely monitored as it moves closer to California.

Since the commercial season opened statewide on January 18, 2024, fishing effort has primarily been concentrated in Fishing Zones 1 and 3. As shown in Table 1, the February 1 biweekly reporting data indicate an effort shift from the Northern Management Area (NMA) (Fishing Zone 1-2) to Central Management Area (CMA) (Fishing Zones 3-6). This effort shift resulted in a similar number of traps reportedly set in the CMA this season compared to the 2022-23 fishing season, despite the 50 percent Gear reduction. Biweekly compliance rates vary but they provide the best direct seasonal comparison and indicate more fishing effort is occurring in the CMA compared to 2023. Given the increased effort in the CMA and the current rolling average three-year Impact Score for both humpback whales and leatherback sea turtles, Marine Region recommends continuation of the 50 percent Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6. This will have the overall effect of reducing the amount of gear in the water and minimizing the potential for lost gear which was a significant contributor to reported entanglements in 2023.

Table 1. Number of active vessels fishing and reported traps in each Management Area as reported in the February 1 biweekly reporting period for 2023 and 2024.

Management Area	2023 Active Vessels	2023 Reported Traps	2024 Active Vessels	2024 Reported Traps
NMA	189	54,933	106	33,493
CMA	120	23,762	158	22,737
Total	309	78,695	264	56,230

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of [this Available Data document](#).

III. Alternatives Considered but Rejected

Alternatives Considered by Rejected

- Depth Restriction by Fishing Zone – not considered for this assessment because it would not reduce overall risk from vertical lines.
- Alternative Gear- can only be authorized after April 1st.