



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

Date: March 13, 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 March 7, 2024, and finalized at the conclusion of the Working Group meeting which was held on March 12, 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.

<b>Fishing Zone</b>	<b>Commercial Fishery: Current Management Status</b>	<b>Commercial Fishery: Proposed Management Status</b>	<b>Recreational Fishery: Current Management Status</b>	<b>Recreational Fishery: Proposed Management Status</b>
1	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
2	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
3	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
4	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
5	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory
6	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	50% Gear Reduction; Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory	Fleet Advisory

## II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

*Entanglements:* No new entanglements of Actionable Species have been reported since the last Risk Assessment on February 15, 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:* Based on the February 28, 2024, CDFW aerial survey in Fishing Zones 1-5, humpback whale sightings remain relatively low but are expected to increase in the coming weeks. Monterey Bay Whale Watch data also show low but increasing humpback whale observations, with a weekly average of 3.6 whales per half-day trip, with a peak of 22 whales observed during half-day trips on February 25, 2024.

Marine Region's final recommendation is for the Director to continue the

current Management Actions for both the commercial and recreational fisheries. This includes 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.

Since the last Risk Assessment on February 15, 2024, biweekly reports and landing data show a decrease in fishing effort in both the Northern Management Area (NMA) and the Central Management Area (CMA). Fishing activity remains largely concentrated in Fishing Zones 1 and 3, but both Fishing Zones showed a decline in active fishing vessels based on the most recent bi-weekly reporting data. Across all Fishing Zones, biweekly reports show a decline from 65,288 traps on February 16 to 56,135 traps on March 1 (Table 8). Similarly, reported landings have seen a steady decline since the statewide opener, which saw a peak at just over 4 million pounds during the week of January 19, 2024.

Humpback whale sightings are still low, though increasing as whales begin their migration to California waters from their winter breeding grounds. Given the decline in fishing effort, Marine Region recommends a continuation of the existing Management Actions to allow fishing opportunity for the fleet while managing entanglement risk.

Humpback whale arrivals are expected to increase in the coming weeks and the fleet should anticipate modifications to existing Management Actions (including potential Zone closures) at the next Risk Assessment. If a closure is needed due to elevated risk, CDFW will expect the fleet to remove gear quickly from those Zones. The fleet should start proactively removing extra gear and/or moving gear closer to port to facilitate timely removal.

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of the [March 7, 2024 Available Data document](#).

### **III. Alternatives Considered but Rejected**

#### **Alternatives Considered by Rejected**

- Depth Restriction- not recommended because it is not anticipated to appreciably reduce entanglement risk due to low whale abundance. While whale abundance is anticipated to increase in the coming weeks, the location of the returning whales is unknown. Implementing a depth restriction may concentrate gear inshore and potentially cause an overlap with arriving humpback whales, thereby increasing entanglement risk.
- Alternative Gear- can only be authorized after April 1st.