



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

Date: December 19, 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 December 16, 2024, and discussed at the Working Group meeting which was held on December 18, 2024. After reviewing all available data and input from the Working Group, Marine Region has prepared a final recommendation. For a map of the RAMP Fishing Zones, see the [Whale Safe Fisheries webpage](#).

I. Recommended Management Actions

Commercial Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 1 and 2: Season Opener with a 25% Gear Reduction on January 5, 2025, at 12:01 am (gear setting period to begin January 2, 2025, at 8:01 am).
 - *Note: Fishing Zones 1 and 2 may be delayed further due to quality testing results (Fish and Game Code Section 8276.2).*
- Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6: Season Opener with a 50% Gear Reduction on January 5, 2025, at 12:01 am (gear setting period to begin January 2, 2025, at 8:01 am).
- All Fishing Zones: Fleet Advisory

Recreational Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 3 and 4: Lift Crab Trap Prohibition on January 2, 2025, at 8:01 am.
- All Fishing Zones: Continue Fleet Advisory

II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

The Marine Region's final recommendation is for the Director to open the Fishing Season in all Fishing Zones (1,2,3,4,5 and 6) on January 5, 2025, at 12:01am.

Fishing Zones 1 and 2 would be subject to a 25% Gear Reduction and Fishing Zones 3, 4, 5 and 6 would be subject to a 50% Gear Reduction. A gear setting period for all Fishing Zones would begin on January 2, 2025, at 8:01am. A Fleet Advisory is also recommended for all Fishing Zones and the commercial fleet should avoid setting traps where whales are present.

The Marine Region also recommends lifting the recreational crab trap prohibition in Fishing Zones 3 and 4 on January 2, 2025, at 8:01am and a continuation of the Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones (1-6) until the next Risk Assessment. The recreational fleet should also avoid setting gear in areas where whales are present.

These recommendations are supported by the high number of entanglements that occurred during the current 2024 calendar year and 3-year average Impact Score for the commercial fishery. Given the elevated Impact Score of 5.66 for humpback whales, a Vertical Line/Gear Reduction is the recommended Management Action to minimize the number of vertical lines/traps for the commercial fishery. As further described below, Marine Life Concentrations are decreasing across all Fishing Zones but there remains a risk of entanglement and precautionary Management Actions should be employed to reduce that risk. Reducing the number of traps used in each Fishing Zone will also reduce the likelihood of lost or abandoned gear throughout the season. All Management Actions will be reevaluated at the next Risk Assessment, which is expected to occur on or around January 15, 2025.

Entanglements: Numerous humpback whale entanglements have been reported since the close of the 2023-24 fishing season. Table 2 in the [Preliminary Assessment](#) describes confirmed Actionable Species entanglements in 2024 that have been reported by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as of Dec. 12, 2024. Humpback whale entanglements in California commercial Dungeness crab fishing gear and Unknown Fishing Gear bring the three-year rolling average Impact Score to 5.66 (subject to revision), which exceeds the trigger as defined in RAMP of two entanglements, requiring Management Action to reduce entanglement risk in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery.

Marine Life Concentrations: Marine Life Concentration (MLC) surveys in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 had zero sightings of humpback or blue whales. In Fishing Zones 3 and 4, humpback whale sightings have decreased but remain elevated. A NOAA aerial survey observed 27 humpbacks whales and 3 blue whales in Fishing Zone 3 and 28 humpbacks in Fishing Zone 4.

Monterey Bay Whale Watch data indicated an average number of humpback whales-per-half-daytrip during the last seven days of 17.7 (a decrease from 35.5), with a peak of 31 (a decrease from 67) whales observed during a half-day trip on Dec. 3, 2024. The decreased sightings are an indication that the migration to winter breeding grounds is well underway, and the recommended opening date and lifting of the prohibition will allow even more time for whales to depart, thereby further reducing entanglement risk. The [sightings data](#) reported during the November 21, 2024 risk assessment supports this analysis and recommendation.

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

III. Alternative Management Actions for the Commercial Fishery

Alternatives Considered but Rejected

- Season Delay - due to no whale observations in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 and lower concentrations of humpback whales in Fishing Zones 3 and 4, this was not the recommended Management Action.
- Depth Restriction - given the current distribution of humpback whales across depths, a depth restriction may inadvertently concentrate trap gear, thereby increasing entanglement risk.
- Alternative Gear - can only be authorized after April 1st.