



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, 2025

An initial assessment and a preliminary recommendation were developed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region staff to inform the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP; Section 132.8, Title 14, California Code of Regulations). The initial assessment was shared with the Working Group on December 15, 2025, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on December 17, 2025. 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 15% Gear Reduction. Note: The season will be delayed until at least January 15, 2026, due to crab quality testing requirements not being met. Gear setting period would begin on January 12, 2026, at 8:01am pending results from domoic acid testing.
- Fishing Zones 3, 4 and 5: Season Opener with a 40% Gear Reduction, effective January 5, 2026, at 12:01am. Gear setting period to begin on January 2, 2026, at 8:01am.

Recreational Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 1, 3 and 4: Lift Crab Trap Prohibition, effective January 2, 2026, at 8:01am.
- Fishing Zones 2 and 5: No RAMP Management Actions recommended.

II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial fishery, Marine Region's final recommendation is for the Director to open the Fishing Season in Fishing Zones 3, 4 and 5 on January 5, 2026, at 12:01am, under a 40% Gear Reduction. A gear setting period for Fishing Zones 3-5 would begin on January 2, 2025, at 8:01am. **Marine Region also recommends that Fishing Zones 1 and 2 open with a 15% Gear Reduction once domoic acid and quality testing requirements are met.** Currently, Fishing Zones 1 and 2 will be delayed until at least January 15, 2026, pending testing requirements.

For the recreational fishery, Marine Region recommends lifting the Crab Trap

Prohibition in Fishing Zones 1, 3 and 4, effective January 2, 2026, at 8:01 am.

These recommendations represent a precautionary approach to address the exceedance of Marine Life Concentration data triggers in Fishing Zones 3 and 4 and to minimize the potential for entanglement. This precautionary approach is important because groups of humpback whales were recently observed in areas that overlap the commercial fishing grounds, particularly in Fishing Zone 3. Input received by the Working Group on December 17, 2025, informed the final recommendations for Gear Reductions to balance the protection of marine life and additional fishing opportunity. Surveys and known migration patterns for humpback whales indicate that whales are leaving California waters for their winter breeding grounds. Marine Region anticipates that the whales will have migrated out of the fishing grounds by the proposed season opener dates, thereby further reducing entanglement risk to allow for 85% of gear allotments to be used in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 and 60% of gear allotments to be used in Fishing Zones 3-5 at the start of the season.

During the 2025 calendar year, there were three entanglements in California commercial Dungeness crab fishing gear and five entanglements in unknown fishing gear that could be from the commercial fishery reported in Fishing Zones 1, 4 and 5. One humpback entanglement was confirmed to have been entangled in gear set in Fishing Zone 1, but gear set locations resulting in entanglements are often unknown. Therefore, it is important to reduce risk across all Fishing Zones by reducing vertical lines (gear allotments) as whales continue to leave important fishing areas while still allowing for fishing opportunities.

It should be noted that gear reduction during the 2025 season and improved lost gear recovery efforts across ports likely contributed to a modest reduction in entanglements over the prior calendar year (2024), when there were four entanglements involving California commercial Dungeness crab gear and ten entanglements in unknown fishing gear. Beginning with the 2025-26 fishing season, line marking requirements will aid in the identification of entanglements when they do occur and support Marine Region's efforts to continue to refine the application of Management Actions under RAMP.

Management actions will be re-evaluated at the next Risk Assessment, which is expected to occur in mid-January 2026. CDFW will continue to closely monitor Actionable Species abundances in state waters and quickly implement Management Actions as necessary to reduce entanglement risk, particularly in the spring months when humpback whales return to California waters.

Entanglements: No new entanglements have been reported since the last Working Group meeting on Oct. 22, 2025.

Marine Life Concentrations: Marine Life Concentration (MLC) data are summarized in the table below where triggers were exceeded:

Fishing Zone	Data Source	MLC Data	Date
3	CDFW Aerial Survey	21 humpback whales	12/09/25
3	CDFW Aerial Survey	34 humpback whales	12/11/25
4	Monterey Bay Whale Watch	7.9, seven-day average number of humpback whales per-half-day trip	12/4-12/10/25

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of the [December 15, 2025 Available Data document](#).

III. Alternatives Considered but Rejected

- Depth Restriction- will not sufficiently provide protection due to distribution of humpback whales across depths and may concentrate trap gear thereby increasing entanglement risk.
- Alternative Gear- can be authorized after April 1st by the Director of CDFW.

Note: Sub Sea Sonics/Gurdian Ropeless Systems have been authorized as an approved Alternative Gear and will be available for use after a Fishery Closure under RAMP after April 1, 2026. Additional information will be made available on the Whale Safe Fisheries Webpage.