



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
DECLARATION OF FISHERY SEASON CLOSURE
IN THE COMMERCIAL DUNGENESS CRAB FISHERY AND
RECREATIONAL CRAB TRAP PROHIBITION
DUE TO RISK OF MARINE LIFE ENTANGLEMENT**

Pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 8276.1(b) and California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 132.8 ("Section 132.8") and Section 29.80(c)(7) ("Section 29.80(c)"), I find and declare that:

I

On March 13, 2026, I evaluated entanglement risk for the commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries pursuant to Sections 132.8 and 29.80(c). I provided the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) and the Whale Safe Fisheries email listserv with notice of the risk assessment and all non-confidential data under consideration on March 10, 2026. Prior to this risk assessment and management response, Department staff reviewed all relevant information and consulted with the Working Group, and I consulted with the president of the Fish and Game Commission.

II

Standardized data from commercial whale-watching trips in Fishing Zone 4 show increasing presence of humpback whales, with a daily high of 15 humpback whales observed during a single half-day trip by Monterey Bay Whale Watch. Pursuant to Section 132.8(c)(2), I must implement a protective Management Action in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery.

III

Two confirmed entanglements of humpback whales in Unknown Fishing Gear were observed on February 8 and 28, 2026. Pursuant to 132.8(d)(9), when assessing management actions, I must consider the number and accumulation pattern of confirmed entanglements, including for the calendar year, current fishing season, prior calendar years, and prior fishing seasons.

IV

Based on data described in Parts II and III and pursuant to Section 29.80(c), I must implement a protective management action in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery. Section 29.80(c) requires that any temporary prohibition on the use of crab traps extend the general crab trap prohibition outlined in Section 29.80(c)(4).

V

There are no Department approved Marine Life Concentration survey data to inform the risk assessment in Fishing Zones 1, 2, and 3. Pursuant to Section 29.80(c)(7)(A)(2) and Section 132.8(c)(2)), I must implement a protective Management Action.

VI

Upon evaluation of the management considerations pursuant to Section 132.8(d), I have determined that the management action listed below protects humpback whales based on the best available science. Additional information on the relevant management considerations is provided in the attachment to this declaration.

VII

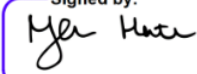
THEREFORE, under the authority granted by Fish and Game Code Section 8276.1(b) and Sections 132.8 and 29.80(c) of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, I am implementing the following management action:

1. Effective March 27, 2026, at 6:00pm, the deployment and use of crab traps in any recreational fishery is prohibited in Fishing Zones 4 and 5.
2. Effective March 27, 2026, at 6:00pm, closure of the commercial Dungeness crab fishery for the remainder of the 2025-26 season in Fishing Zones 4 and 5. All commercial Dungeness crab traps must be removed from ocean waters in this Fishing Zone by that date and time. The take and possession of Dungeness crab aboard a commercially permitted vessel from closed waters is prohibited after 6:00pm on March 27, 2026, pursuant to Fish and Game Code 8276.1(d). This closure does not apply when using authorized Alternative Gear, as stated below.
3. Retrieval operations under the Lost or Abandoned Dungeness Crab Trap Gear Retrieval Program, as defined in Section 132.7 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, may begin in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 at 6:00am on April 3, 2026.

4. Pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(E) of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, beginning at 6:00am on April 3, 2026, permitted Dungeness crab vessels may retrieve an unlimited number of commercial Dungeness crab traps from Fishing Zones 4 and 5 which are lost, damaged, abandoned, or otherwise derelict. All crustaceans and finfish must be immediately returned to the water and not retained when retrieving lost, abandoned, or derelict Dungeness crab traps pursuant to this declaration. The Department requests that individuals retrieving gear pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(E) report their activities to WhaleSafeFisheries@wildlife.ca.gov. The Department also requests individuals to submit a CalTIP notification if they observe large amounts of gear from a given permit holder within any of these Fishing Zones. Individuals possessing or retrieving traps from Fishing Zones 4 and 5 pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(E) are prohibited from possessing crab. Any vessel operating or transiting in an open Fishing Zone may not possess more than six traps belonging to another vessel, pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(A).
5. Effective, April 3, 2026, at 7:00am, authorized Alternative Gear may be used in all closed Fishing Zones pursuant to Section 132.8(i). Alternative Gear conditions for use are available on the [Whale Safe Fisheries Webpage](#) and both the General and Specific conditions must be adhered to by all vessel's operating in closed Fishing Zones while using Alternative Gear. Any person or vessel in possession of Dungeness crab in violation of the conditions for Alternative Gear use or any person using traps to take Dungeness crab in closed Fishing Zones that are in violation of the conditions for Alternative Gear may be cited pursuant to section 132.8(j).
6. All crab taken in a Fishing Zone using Alternative Gear must also be landed in a Fishing Zone that is closed except for the use of Alternative Gear.

These management actions are in effect until modified. The next risk assessment is expected to occur on or before April 3, 2026.

Updates and material regarding future entanglement risk evaluations in the commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries will be made available on the [Department's Whale Safe Fisheries web page](#).

Signed by:

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3/13/2026

Meghan Hertel, Director

Date/Time

ATTACHMENT TO DIRECTOR MARCH 13, 2026 DECLARATION OF FISHERY SEASON
CLOSURE IN THE COMMERCIAL DUNGENESS CRAB FISHERY AND RECREATIONAL CRAB
TRAP PROHIBITION DUE TO RISK OF MARINE LIFE ENTANGLEMENT

Information referenced in this Attachment is further described in the Final Assessment of Marine Life Entanglement Risk and Management Recommendation dated March 13, 2026, and the Available Data and Preliminary Assessment document dated March 10, 2026, located at the Department's [Whale Safe Fisheries website](#), which to the Department's knowledge represents the best available science informing this risk assessment.

These recommendations are based on increasing Marine Life Concentrations, recent humpback whale entanglement reports, entanglement history, high Habitat Compression Index and migration patterns of humpback whales.