

California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) Management Recommendation to inform the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Working Group Discussion Date: March 11, 2026

The Working Group discussed Marine Region's preliminary recommendation for the commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries. For the commercial fishery, the Department recommended a continuation of the 15% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 and the 40% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zone 3. The Department recommended a Season Closure for Fishing Zones 4 and 5 effective March 27, 2026, at 6:00pm. Alternative Gear would be authorized for use in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 effective April 3, 2026, at 7:00am. For the recreational fishery, Marine Region recommended a Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 effective March 27, 2026, at 6:00pm.

The Working Group provided broad support and limited opposition for Marine Region's recommendations in both the commercial and recreational fisheries. The Working Group also provided two alternative recommendations.

Working Group Recommendation #1: Extend Commercial Season Closure to include Fishing Zone 3, Begin Alternative Gear on April 1, and Extend Recreational Crab Trap Prohibition to Include Fishing Zone 3

The Working Group provided a recommendation for the commercial fishery to extend the Season Closure to include in Fishing Zone 3, in addition to the Department recommendation for a Season Closure for Fishing Zones 4 and 5. The recommendation also outlined an earlier start date of April 1 for Alternative Gear which minimizes the time gap between use of traditional gear and Alternative Gear. Finally, the recommendation also extended the recreational Crab Trap Prohibition to include Fishing Zone 3, in addition to Fishing Zones 4 and 5 as recommended by the Department.

This recommendation is based on many factors including high entanglements in recent years, migration history and arrival time of humpback whales to California's waters by end of March as whales are returning to their feeding grounds. In 2026 there are already two entanglements this fishing season with the potential of being CA Dungeness crab. The recommendation also noted that there is often a time lag between when triggers are exceeded and when Management Actions are implemented. This includes the last aerial survey conducted on February 26th, implying that the survey data may already be out

of date. The recommendation also noted concerning oceanographic conditions including habitat compression and marine heat waves, which can indicate strong correlations with entanglement risk. Fishing activity in Fishing Zone 3 has decreased, indicating high risk and low reward for keeping the Fishing Zone open longer. Lastly, consistency of Management Actions among all Central Management Area Fishing Zones (3-5) is preferred.

This recommendation received limited support and broad opposition.

Working Group Recommendation #2: Commercial Season Closure for Fishing Zones 1-2, Recreational Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 1-2

The Working Group provided a recommendation for a commercial fishery Season Closure in Fishing Zones 1 and 2, start date for Alternative Gear, and a recreational fishery Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 1 and 2. The recommendation outlines a the Season Closure and Crab Trap Prohibition be implemented on April 10th at 6pm, and Alternative Gear to be implemented April 11th at 7:00am.

The key rationale remained the same from the Working Group Recommendation #1, with clarification that implementation dates were informed by a later season opening date in Fishing Zones 1 and 2, but a closure date should occur two weeks later than Fishing Zone 3. In the absence of approved data in Fishing Zones 1 and 2, RAMP regulations state that a Management Action should be implemented, which could include a fishery closure. Additionally, rationale was provided that use of Alternative Gear would potentially aid in removal of lost or abandoned gear.

This recommendation received limited support and broad opposition.