

2025-2026 Risk Assessment Available Data for Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Last updated: March 30, 2026

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

This Preliminary Assessment and Management Recommendation has been 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). A Final Assessment and Management Recommendation will be prepared after conferring with the Working Group on April 1, 2026.

Recommended Management Actions

Commercial Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 1-2: Continue 15% Gear Reduction
- Fishing Zone 3: Continue 40% Gear Reduction
- Fishing Zones 4-5: Season Closed (Alternative Authorized beginning April 3)

Recreational Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 4-5: Continue Crab Trap Prohibition
- All Fishing Zones: Continue Fleet Advisory

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I. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial fishery, Marine Region's preliminary recommendation is for the Director to continue the 15% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zones 1-2 and 40% Gear Reduction in Fishing Zone 3. Fishing Zones 4 and 5 closed for the season on March 27, 2026 and Alternative Gear is authorized for use effective April 3, 2026, for the remainder of the statutory season.

For the recreational fishery, Marine Region recommends a continuation of the Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 4-5 and a Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones.

These recommendations are based on the recent Marine Life Concentration surveys and historical migration patterns of humpback whales. The Management Actions currently in place, including Gear Reductions, Season Closure, and Crab Trap Prohibition, provide adequate entanglement risk reduction given the low abundances of Actionable Species in the fishing grounds. Additionally, reduced fishing effort across all open Fishing Zones further reduces entanglement risk until the next risk assessment. The fleet should however be vigilant and be prepared for additional Management Actions (including Fishing Zone closures) to be implemented in the coming weeks as humpbacks whales continue their migration northward and Marine Life Concentrations increase.

No additional management actions are recommended for Fishing Zones 1, 2 and 3 at this time as Gear Reductions are already in place, Marine Life Concentrations are low, effort is decreasing, and fishing is occurring in shallower depths. Fishing effort as reported in bi-weekly reports for Fishing Zones 1 and 2 has remained steady over the past month, however fishing is occurring largely in shallower depths (average depth of 32 fathoms; min: 13 fa; max: 78 fa). Fishing Zone 3 has declining effort, with 65 permits submitting for the Mar. 16, 2026 reporting period and 78 permits submitting for the Mar.1, 2026 reporting period. The average depth fished in Fishing Zone 3 was 39 fathoms (min: 20 fa; max 85 fa).

Entanglements: Two confirmed entanglements of humpback whales in unknown fishing gear were reported in February 2026. Both cases have been reviewed by NMFS and are considered to be Unknown entanglements. Two more cases were reported to NMFS from Mexico since the last risk assessment. One humpback whale entanglement was reported on Dec. 3, 2025, and confirmed to have a CA commercial Dungeness 2023-25 buoy tag and another humpback whale entanglement was reported on Jan. 26, 2026. Both cases are under review with NMFS and pending determination by CDFW.

Marine Life Concentrations: CDFW aerial surveys observed no Actionable Species during three aerial surveys conducted on March 16, 17, and 24, 2026, that covered Fishing Zones 1-5. Monterey Bay Whale Watch data from Fishing Zone 4 show a peak of 22 humpback whales on a morning trip on March 24, 2026. Note: Fishing Zone 4 closed on March 27, 2026.

II. Alternative Management Actions for the Commercial Fishery

Alternatives Considered but Rejected

- Fishery Closure - most protective but in consideration of currently low whale abundance across open Fishing Zones and economic impacts to the fleet, it was not the recommended Management Action at this time.

AVAILABLE DATA

III. Triggers Requiring Management Action

I. Confirmed Entanglements: §132.8(a)(4); Information from NOAA: §132.8(d)(2); and Triggers for Management Action: §132.8(c)

Data provided by: Lauren Saez and Dan Lawson (National Marine Fisheries Service)

The table below outlines the confirmed entanglements under RAMP beginning with the 2026 calendar year. See “[2025-2026 Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery - Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)” for information about the RAMP Entanglement Evaluation. More information and definitions, please see the [RAMP Entanglement History](#) document.

The current Entanglement Evaluation is 0.50 for humpback whales for the 2026 calendar year. Until November 1, 2028, a Confirmed Entanglement in Unknown Fishing Gear shall be applied as one-quarter (0.25) of a Confirmed Entanglement in California Commercial Dungeness Crab Gear. As of March 30, 2026, there have been zero Confirmed Entanglements of blue whales or leatherback sea turtles during the 2026 calendar year.

Table 1. Actionable Species Entanglements beginning in 2026, pursuant to RAMP regulations.

Entanglement ID	Date	Species	Fishery	Score
20260228Mn	02/28/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260208Mn	02/08/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260126Mn	01/26/26	Humpback whale	Under review	

Note that a recent entanglement of a humpback whale was reported in Banderas Bay, Mexico, on December 3, 2025, that was confirmed to have a California commercial Dungeness crab buoy tag from the 2023-2025 period. This case is currently being reviewed by NMFS.

II. Marine Life Concentrations: §132.8(c)(2)

Data provided by: California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Monterey Bay Whale Watch (processed by Karin Forney, Upwell)

According to the RAMP regulations for the period of March 1 until the Fishing Season closes statewide a trigger has been met when:

- The number of humpback whales is greater than or equal to 10, or there is a running average of five or more animals over a one-week period within a single Fishing Zone.

- The number of blue whales is greater than or equal to three, or there is a running average of three or more animals over a one-week period within a single Fishing Zone
- The number of Pacific leatherback sea turtle is greater than or equal to one within any Fishing Zone

Table 21. Summary of available CDFW-approved survey data for Marine Life Concentrations for each Fishing Zone, and whether the triggers have been met for any Fishing Zone.

Fishing Zone	CDFW-approved survey data	Triggers attained?
Zone 1	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 2	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 3	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 4	CDFW Aerial Survey, MBWW	Yes*
Zone 5	CDFW Aerial Survey	No*

*Note: Fishing Zones 4-5 closed on March 27, 2026.

A. CDFW Surveys (Fishing Zones 1-5)

CDFW staff conducted three aerial surveys between March 16-24, 2026, across all Fishing Zones (Table 3). No Actionable Species were observed.

On March 16, 2026, CDFW staff conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathom contour line from Bodega Bay (Fishing Zone 3) to Morro Bay (Fishing Zone 5) at an altitude of 1000' (Figure 1). Conditions were favorable with Beaufort states of 1-2 and clear skies. In Fishing Zone 3, one unidentified whale was observed. In Fishing Zone 4, 10 gray whales were observed. In Fishing Zone 5, one unidentified whale and six gray whales were observed.

On March 17, 2026, CDFW staff conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathom contour line from Bodega Bay (Fishing Zone 3) to Crescent City (Fishing Zone 1) at an altitude of 1000' (Figure 2). The survey was unable to be conducted across the entirety of Fishing Zone 1 due to low-lying fog cover obscuring visibility between Cape Mendocino and Trinidad, and north of Crescent City. Conditions were generally favorable with Beaufort states ranging from 1 to 3. In Fishing Zone 2, one unidentified whale and six gray whales were observed.

On March 24, 2026, CDFW staff conducted an aerial survey covering Fishing Zone 3 and Fishing Zone 4 via the east-west transect lines from Bodega Bay (Fishing Zone 3) to Davenport (Fishing Zone 4) between the coast and the 100-fathom depth contour line at an altitude of 1000' (Figure 3). Conditions were favorable with clear skies and Beaufort states ranging from 1 to 3. Observer staff recorded one unidentified whale in Fishing Zone 3

Table 3. Counts of Actionable Species seen by CDFW aerial surveys conducted on March 16-24, 2026.

Survey Date	Fishing Zone	Humpback whales	Unidentified whales
3/24/26	Zone 3	0	1
3/24/26	Zone 4	0	0
3/17/26	Zone 1	0	0
3/17/26	Zone 2	0	1
3/16/26	Zone 3	0	1
3/16/26	Zone 4	0	0
3/16/26	Zone 5	0	1

CDFW Aerial Survey - Mar. 16, 2026

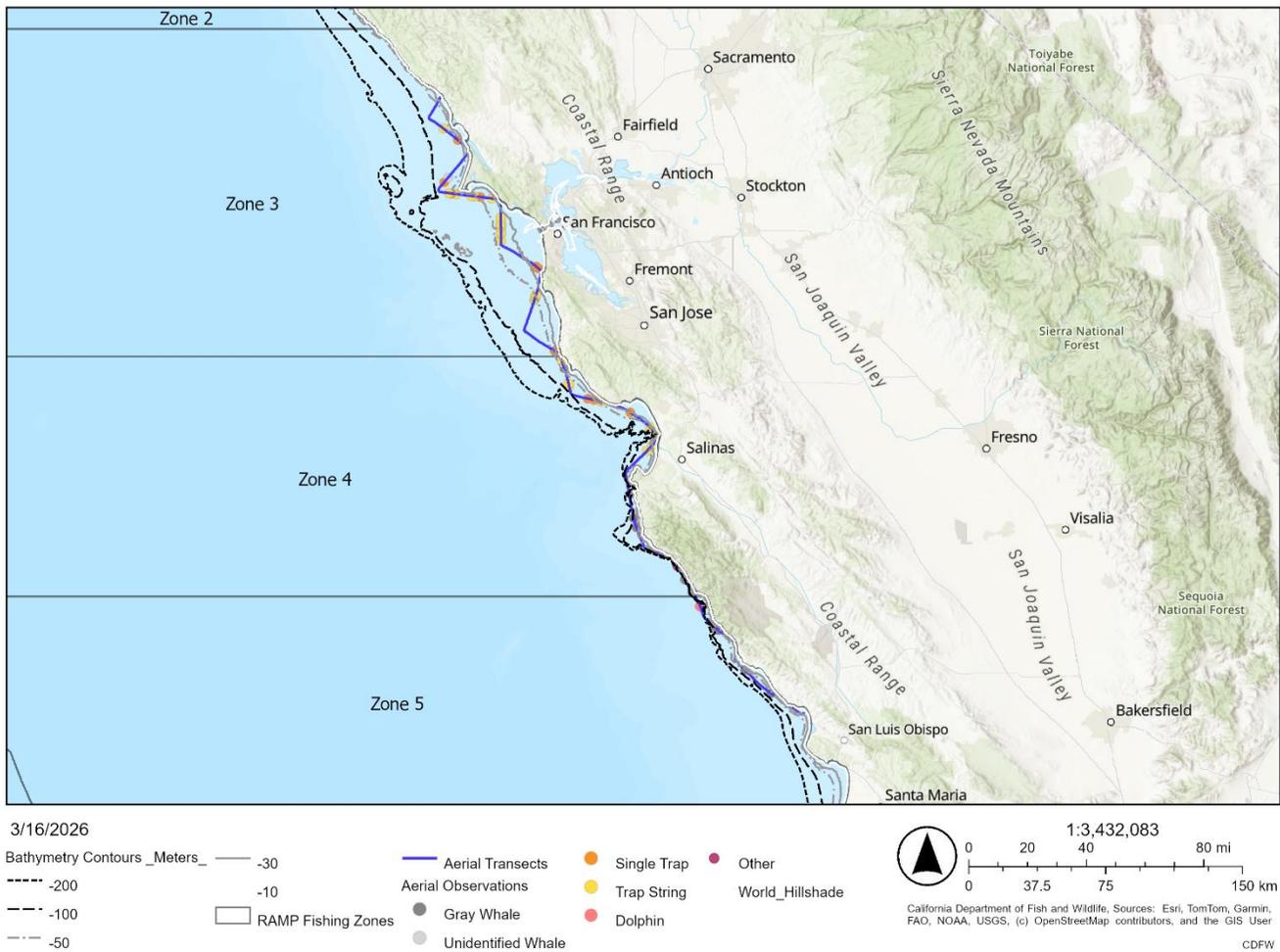


Figure 1. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zones 3-5 on March 16, 2026.

CDFW Aerial Survey - Mar. 17, 2026

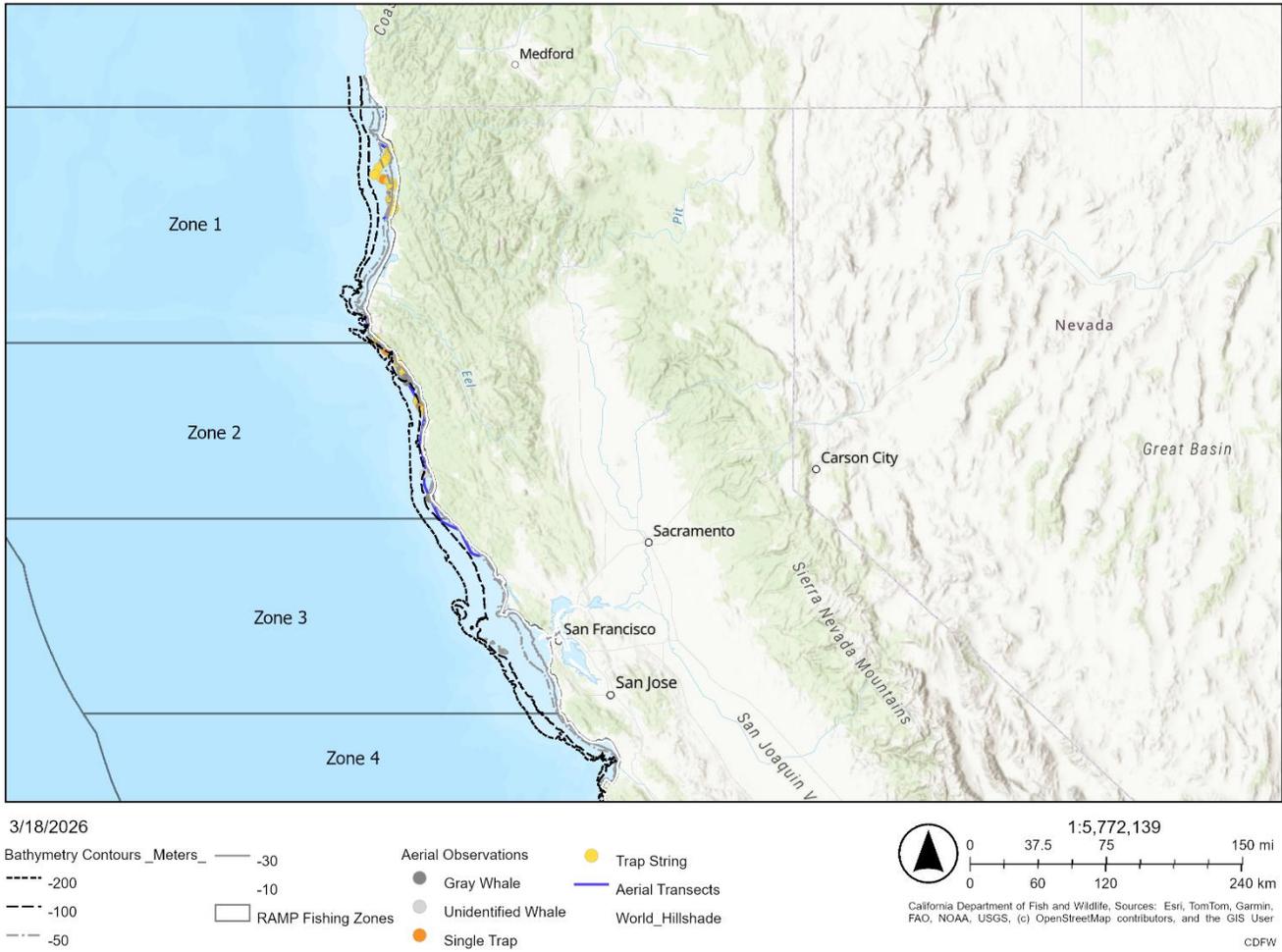


Figure 2. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zones 1-2 on March 17, 2026.

CDFW Aerial Survey - Mar. 24, 2026

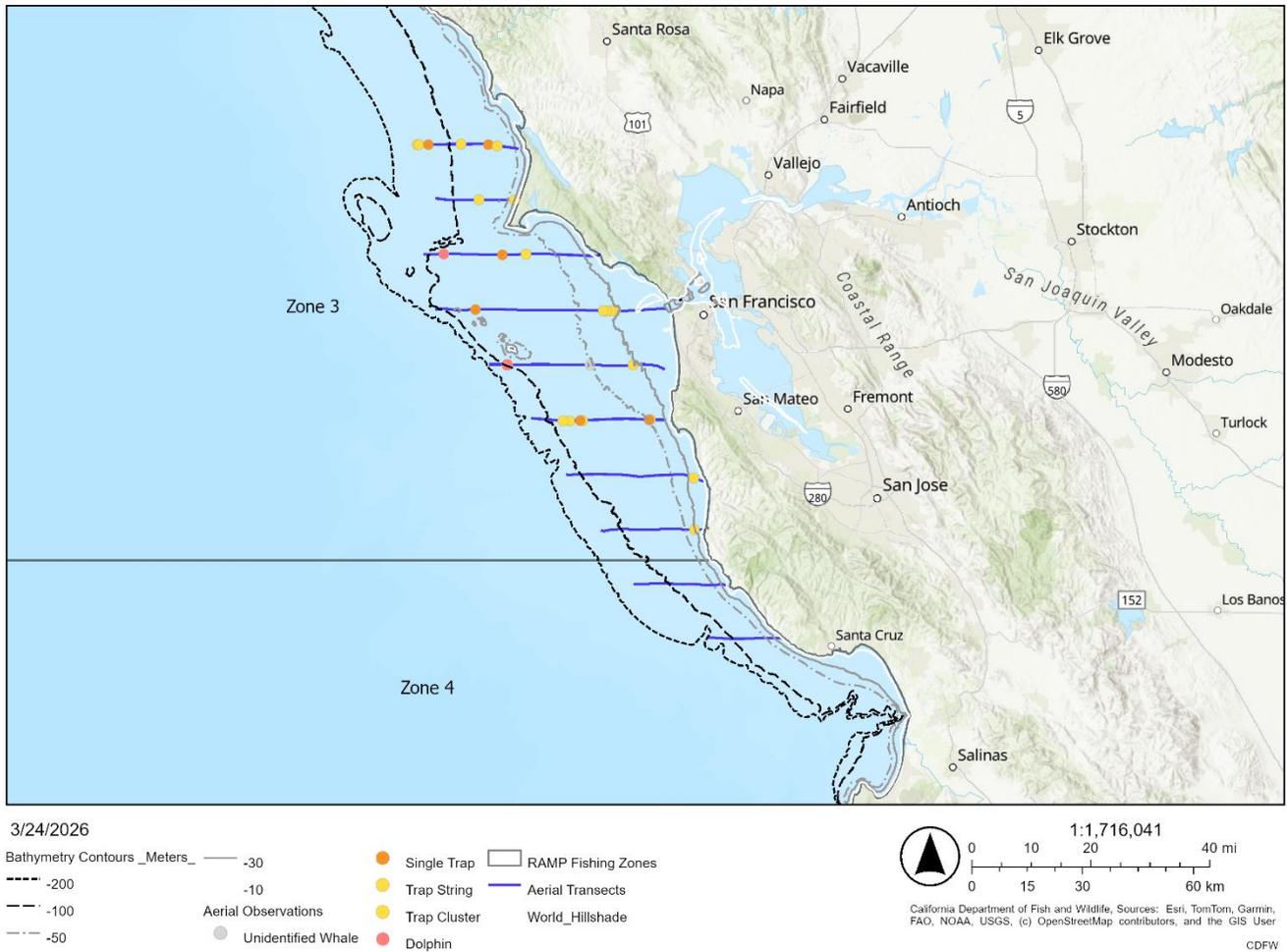


Figure 3. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zones 3-4 on March 24, 2026.

B. Monterey Bay Whale Watch Surveys (Fishing Zone 4)

Monterey Bay Whale Watch conducted whale watching trips in southern Monterey Bay every day during the week of March 18-24, 2026. The 7-day average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip during March 18-24, 2026, was 3.1, with a peak of 22 humpback whales observed on a morning trip on March 24 (Figure 4).

**Monterey Bay Whale Watch: Humpback whales per 1/2-day trip
(Nov 15, 2021 - Mar 24, 2026)**

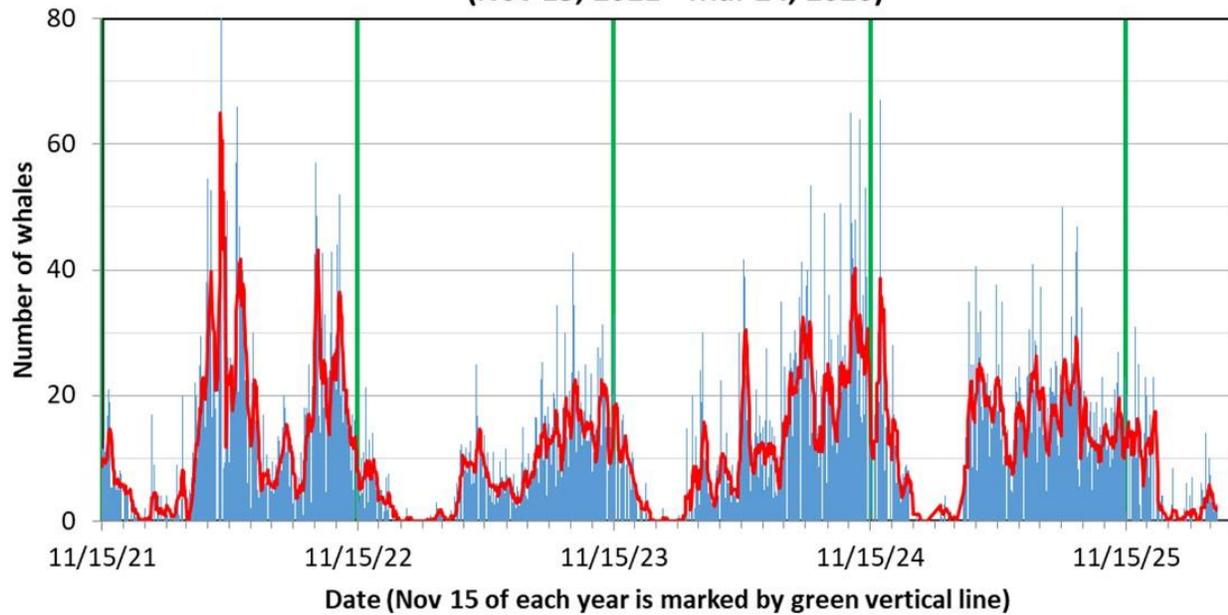


Figure 4. Standardized number of humpback whale sightings for Monterey Bay Whale Watch from November 15, 2021 – March 24, 2026. The y-axis is the number of whales per half-day trip; the thin blue bars are the average daily whale numbers, and the red line is a 7-day running average to make the patterns a bit easier to see. A vertical green line has been added at November 15 of each year for reference. Each tick mark is one month.

IV. Management Considerations

I. Historic patterns and current Actionable Species migration: §132.8(d)(5)

Data provided by: Point Blue Conservation Science and Monterey Bay Whale Watch (processed by Karin Forney, Upwell)

A. Point Blue Conservation Science (Fishing Zones 3, 4, and Santa Barbara Channel)

For current observation data please see the [Point Blue Whale Alert map](#).

Table 4. Summary of available humpback and blue whale recorded reported via Point Blue Conservation Science in Fishing Zones 3, 4, and 6 during the seven-day period ending March 26, 2026.

Fishing Zone	Number of humpback whales sighted	Number of blue whales sighted
Zone 3	0	0
Zone 4	3	0
Santa Barbara Channel	9	0

B. Monterey Bay Whale Watch (Fishing Zone 4)

The semi-monthly average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip in southern Monterey Bay is slightly below the historical average for this time of year (Figure 5).

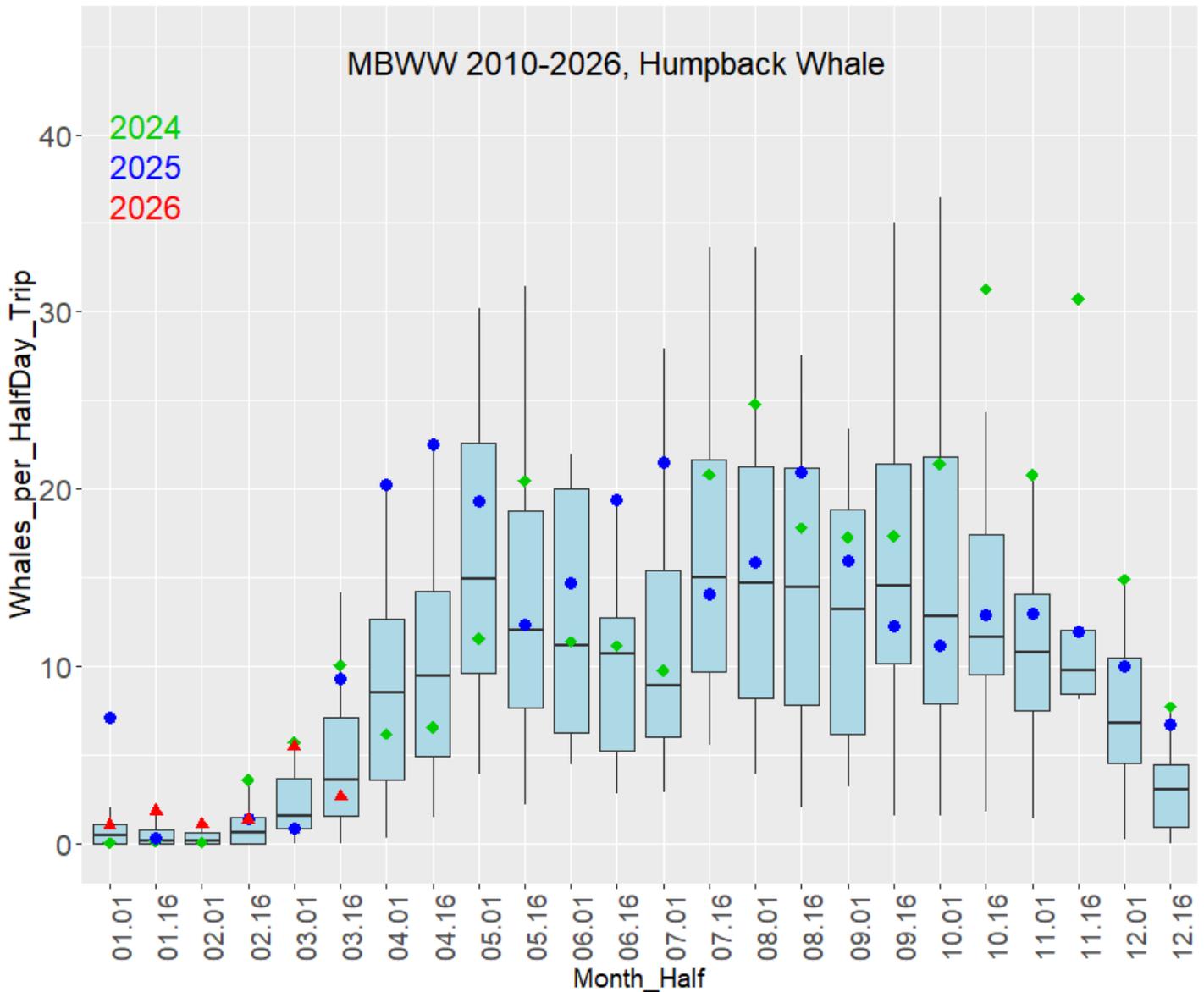


Figure 5. Historical Monterey Bay Whale Watch data for 2010-2026, summarizing the average and variation in the number of humpback whales per half-day trip on a semi-monthly basis (1st- 15th, 16th- end of month). This boxplot follows standard statistical practice in that the black horizontal line is the average number of whales; the blue box shows the 25th-75th percentiles (i.e., half of all past whale numbers are within the blue box); the vertical lines show the range of whale numbers excluding outliers, and outliers are shown as small black dots. Values for 2024 (green diamonds), 2025 (blue dots) and 2026 (red triangles) and are provided for reference, placing recent whale numbers in a historical context.

II. Fishing Season dynamics: § 132.8(d)(6)

A. Marine Landings Data System (All Fishing Zones)

*Data provided by: California Department of Fish and Wildlife. *CDFW data presented in this section is preliminary and subject to revision.*

Fishing Zones 1 and 2 are currently open under a 15% Gear Reduction. Fishing Zone 3 is open under a 40% Gear Reduction. Fishing Zones 4 and 5 are closed for

traditional gear as of March 27, 2026. Alternative Gear was authorized beginning April 3, 2026. A summary of landings from all Fishing Zones is provided below (Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of fishing season dynamics information for the commercial fishery, as of March 26, 2026.

Metric	Value
Season status	Zones 1-2 are under a 15% Gear Reduction Zone 3 is under a 40% Gear Reduction Zones 4-5 are closed; open to Alternative Gear
Number of landings	4,355
Total volume (pounds)	8,379,639
Total Ex-Vessel Value	\$ 41,091,681
Average unit price	\$5.19
Total number of active vessels	375
Maximum potential traps (based on active permits)	92,558

* Estimates are also provided in the Bi-Weekly Fishing Activity Reports Subsection

Total volume (pounds) peaked during the week of January 19, 2026, at 2.58 million pounds and has since been decreasing (Figure 6). Fishing Zone 1 shows the highest landings over the course of the season at 4.55 million pounds, followed by Fishing Zone 3 at 2.88 million pounds.

Volume of Landings (Pounds), by Week and Fishing Zone, 2025-26 Season

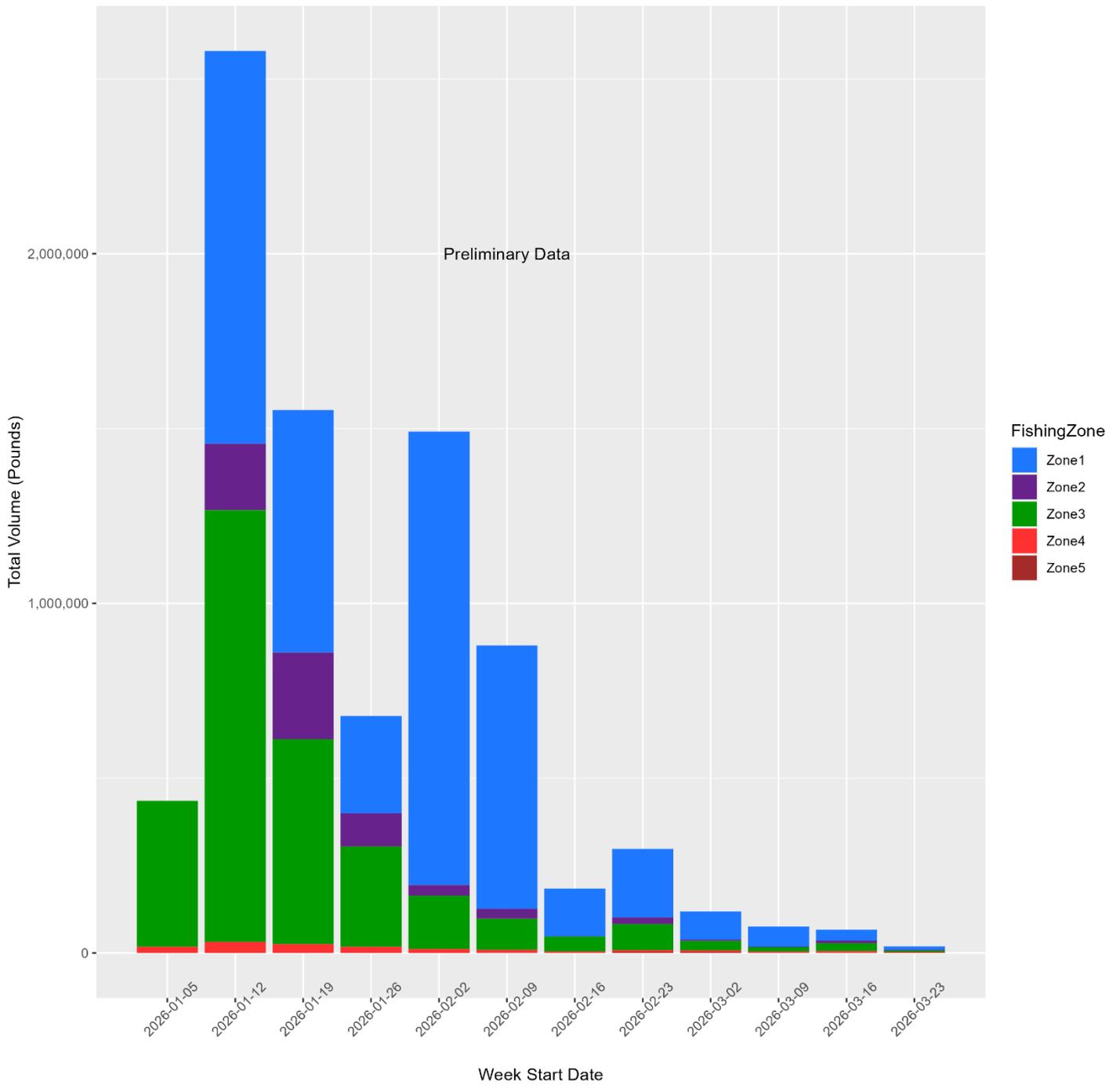


Figure 6. Volume (pounds) landed by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2024. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Certain week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

Fishing Zones 1 and 3 show the highest number of active vessels throughout the fishing season to date with a high of 334 active vessels (Figure 7). The number of active vessels peaked in early February and has fluctuated with a slight decline since then.

Number of Active Vessels, by Week and FishingZone, 2025-26 Season

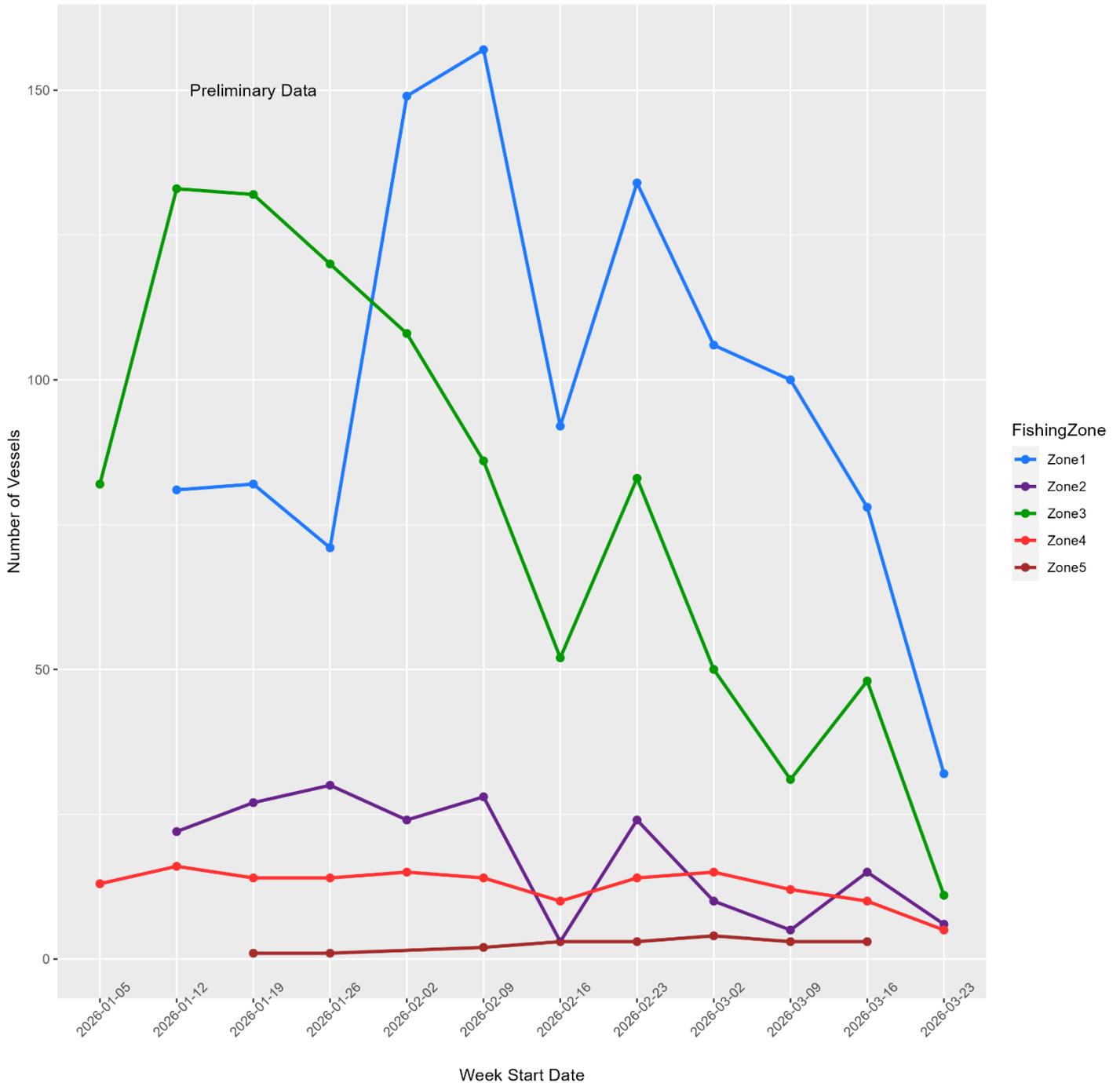


Figure 7. Number of active vessels by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2024. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Some week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

B. Bi-Weekly Fishing Activity Reports (All Fishing Zones)

CDFW has received bi-weekly reports since the first reporting period on January 16, 2026, through the most recent reporting period of March 16, 2026. A summary of reports received for March 16, 2026, are provided in Table 6; note this summary may not reflect all permitted vessels participating in the fishery due to compliance issues.

Table 6. Summary of information provided for the March 16, 2026, bi-weekly reporting period by Fishing Zone (1-6). Accessed from CDFW's Bi-Weekly Reporting database on March 26, 2026. All data are preliminary and subject to change.

Fishing Zone	Permits Reporting	Avg. Trap Number	Total Traps Set	Avg. Min. Depth (fa.)	Avg. Max. Depth (fa.)	Max. Depth (fa.)	Number of Newly Lost Traps
Zone 1	120	280	31,688	13	31	78	154
Zone 2	21	139	2,925	16	32	60	3
Zone 3	65	140	8,311	20	39	85	70
Zone 4	17	97	1,370	18	36	60	23
Zone 5	4	119	476	24	35	40	8
Totals	227	NA	44,770	NA	NA	NA	258

Table 7. Total reported traps deployed in each Fishing Zone for the most recent five bi-weekly reporting periods. Accessed from CDFW's Bi-Weekly Reporting database on March 26, 2026. NR-C refers to data withheld due to confidentiality. All data are preliminary and subject to change.

Fishing Zone	Jan 16 - Total Traps	Feb 1 - Total Traps	Feb 16 - Total Traps	Mar 1 - Total Traps	Mar 16 - Total Traps
Zone 1	23,409	44,713	54,398	45,868	31,688
Zone 2	4,824	6,622	6,797	3,975	2,925
Zone 3	22,535	2,1469	18,039	13,390	8,311
Zone 4	2,055	2,698	2,337	2,610	1,370
Zone 5	NR-C	NR-C	340	395	476
Totals	52,823	75,502	81,911	66,238	44,770

III. Ocean conditions: §132.8(d)(8)

A. El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic

As of March 12, a transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in the next month, with ENSO-neutral favored through May-July 2026 (55% chance). In June-August 2026, El Niño is likely to emerge (62% chance) and persist through at least the end of 2026. Please visit the [NOAA ENSO Diagnostic webpage](#) for more information.

B. Large Marine Heatwave Tracker

No new available data. Please see the [March 10, 2026 Available Data and Preliminary Assessment document](#) or the [NOAA Marine Heatwave Tracker](#)

[webpage](#) for more information. [Insert narrative summarizing current state of marine heatwaves with link]

C. Habitat Compression Index

No new available data. Please see the [March 10, 2026 Available Data and Preliminary Assessment document](#) or the [NOAA Habitat Compression Index webpage](#) for more information.