



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

Date: April 3, 2026

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 March 30, 2026, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on April 1, 2026. 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 1-2: Continue 15% Gear Reduction
- Fishing Zone 3: Continue 40% Gear Reduction
- Fishing Zones 4-5: Season Closed (Alternative Gear authorized beginning April 3)

Recreational Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 4-5: Continue Crab Trap Prohibition

II. All Fishing Zones: Continue Fleet Advisory Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial fishery, Marine Region's final 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 abundance 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.

Historical migration patterns indicate that entanglement risk starts to increase during the spring as whales begin their northern migration, however the exact timing of this migration varies by year. The Department will continue to collect data to inform Marine Life Concentrations and could reconvene the WG prior to the next Risk Assessment in the event Marine Life Concentrations significantly increase in open Fishing Zones. Once migration starts, Marine Life Concentrations can increase quickly. Therefore, the fleet should be vigilant and prepared for additional Management Actions (including Fishing Zone closures) to be implemented in the coming weeks.

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). Effort in Fishing Zone 3 is declining (65 permits, Mar. 16, 2026 reporting period; 78 permits, 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 identified as 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.

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

III. 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.