

# 2025-2026 Risk Assessment

## Available Data for Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Last updated: April 14, 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 15, 2026.

#### Recommended Management Actions

##### Commercial Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 1-2: Continue 15% Gear Reduction and implement a 30-fathom depth constraint, effective April 30, 2026.
- Fishing Zone 3: Fishery Closure effective April 30, 2026, and authorization of Alternative Gear effective May 7, 2026.
- Fishing Zones 4-5: Season Closed (Alternative Gear authorized)

##### 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 implement a 30-fathom Depth Constraint effective April 30, 2026. For Fishing Zone 3, Marine Region's preliminary recommendation is a Fishery Zone Closure effective April 30, 2026, and the authorization of Alternative Gear effective May 7, 2026.**

**Fishing Zones 4 and 5 closed for the season on March 27, 2026, and Alternative Gear was authorized for use in the commercial fishery 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 supported by historical migration patterns and recent observation of 66 humpback whales by Point Blue Conservation Science researchers at the Farallon Islands. In addition, fishing effort is expected to increase over the coming weeks based on market conditions, thereby increasing the co-occurrence of vertical lines and humpback whales across open Fishing Zones. A Season Closure, Gear Reductions, and a Depth Constraint will provide entanglement risk reduction as humpback whales begin to arrive from their winter breeding grounds. The fleet should remain vigilant and be prepared for additional Management Actions (including additional Fishing Zone closures) to be implemented in the coming weeks as Marine Life Concentrations increase. The next risk assessment is expected to occur on or around April 30, 2026.

*Entanglements:* The humpback whale entanglement reported on Jan. 26, 2026, has been reviewed by NMFS and determined to be Oregon Dungeness crab gear. A humpback whale entanglement was reported on April 10, 2026, off San Diego, CA. No other information is available at this time, and the gear origin is unknown.

*Marine Life Concentrations:* Observations from the Farallon Islands by Point Blue Conservation Science observed 66 humpback whales over the last seven days with one single day observation, April 13, 2026, recording 64 humpback whales. A CDFW aerial survey observed two humpback whales and one unidentified whale in Fishing Zone 3 on April 8, 2026. A CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zones 1-2 on April 13, 2026, observed no Actionable Species.

## II. Alternative Management Actions for the Commercial Fishery

### Alternatives Considered but Rejected

- Fishery Closure for all Fishing Zones - most protective but in consideration of currently low whale abundance in Fishing Zones 1 and 2, 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 April 13, 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. Bold denotes new information since the last Risk Assessment.

Entanglement ID	Date	Species	Fishery	Score
<b>20260410Mn</b>	<b>04/10/26</b>	<b>Humpback whale</b>	<b>Pending</b>	<b>Pending</b>
20260228Mn	02/28/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260208Mn	02/08/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
<b>20260106Mn</b>	<b>01/06/26</b>	<b>Humpback whale</b>	<b>OR Dungeness Crab</b>	<b>NA</b>

## 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 turtles 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.

<b>Fishing Zone</b>	<b>CDFW-approved survey data</b>	<b>Triggers attained?</b>
Zone 1	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 2	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 3	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 4	Season Closed – CDFW Aerial Survey	NA
Zone 5	Season Closed	NA

### **A. CDFW Surveys (Fishing Zones 1-3, partial Fishing Zone 4)**

On April 8, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathoms at an altitude of 1000ft covering Fishing Zone 3 with partial coverage of Fishing Zone 4 (Figure 1). Patchy cloud conditions prevented a transect being flown in the Bodega Bay area. Otherwise, conditions were favorable with a Beaufort state of 1-2. Two humpback whales and one unidentified whale were seen in Fishing Zone 3, and one unidentified whale in Fishing Zone 4.

On April 13, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathoms at an altitude of 1000ft covering Fishing Zones 1 and 2 (Figure 2) from Point Arena to the CA/OR border. Skies were mostly clear; patches of fog increased between Cape Mendocino and Trinidad but cleared quickly. Cloud cover between Klamath and the Oregon border was higher than the survey altitude and did not obstruct visibility. Beaufort states ranged between 2 to 3. No Actionable Species were observed in either Fishing Zone 1 or 2.

Table 3. Counts of Actionable Species seen by CDFW aerial survey conducted on April 8 and 13, 2026.

<b>Survey Date</b>	<b>Fishing Zone</b>	<b>Humpback whales</b>	<b>Unidentified whales</b>
4/13/26	Zone 1	0	0
4/13/26	Zone 2	0	0
4/8/26	Zone 3	2	1
4/8/26	Zone 4	0	1

# CDFW Aerial Survey - Apr. 8, 2026

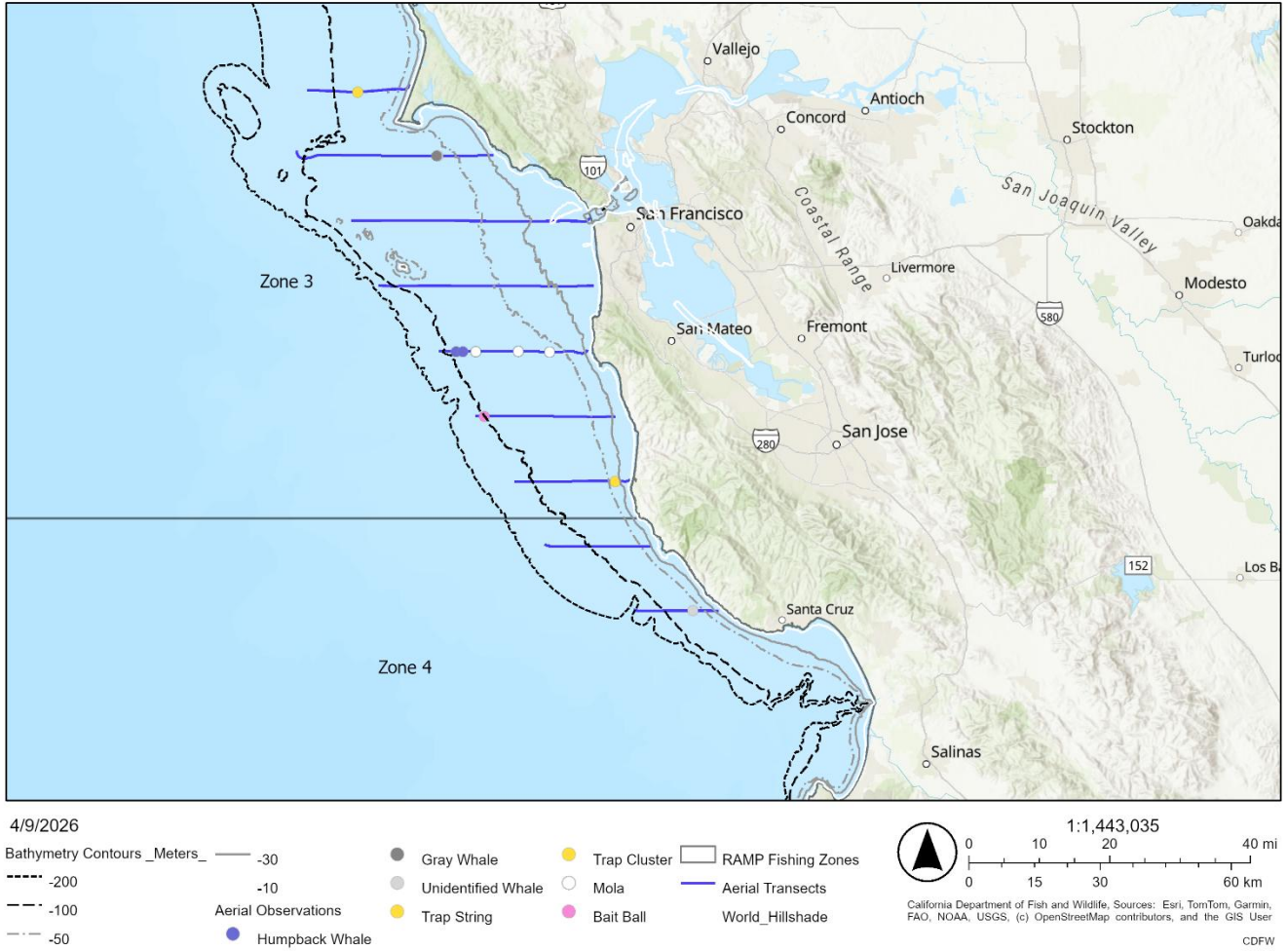


Figure 1. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted on April 8, 2026, in Fishing Zones 3-4.

## CDFW Aerial Survey - April 13, 2026

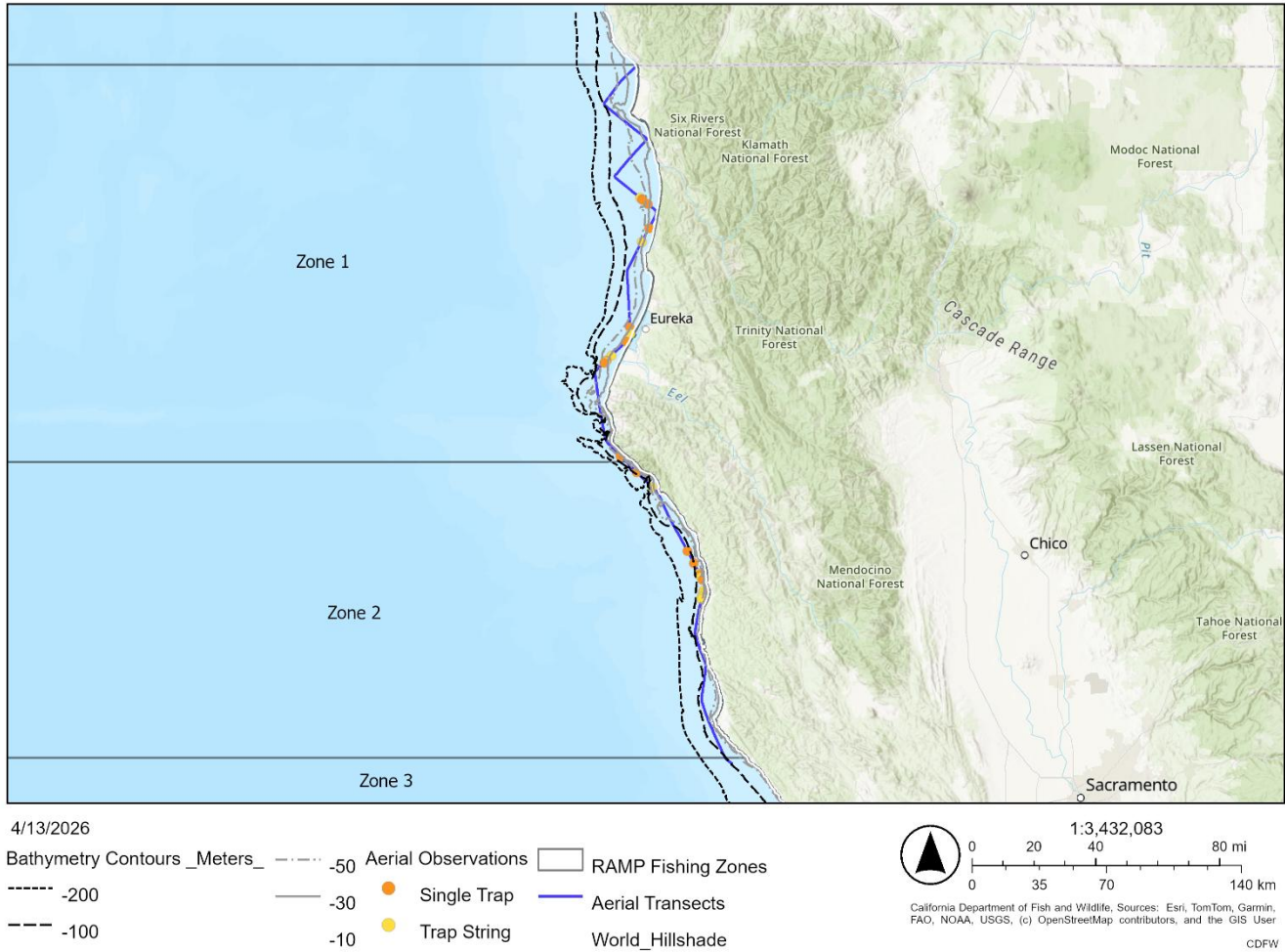


Figure 2. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted on April 13, 2026, in Fishing Zones 1-2.

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

Monterey Bay Whale Watch conducted whale-watching trips in southern Monterey Bay on all seven days during the week of March 31 – April 6, 2026. The 7-day average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip during March 31– April 6, 2026, was 6.2, with a peak of 25 humpback whales observed on a morning trip on April 1 (Figure 3).

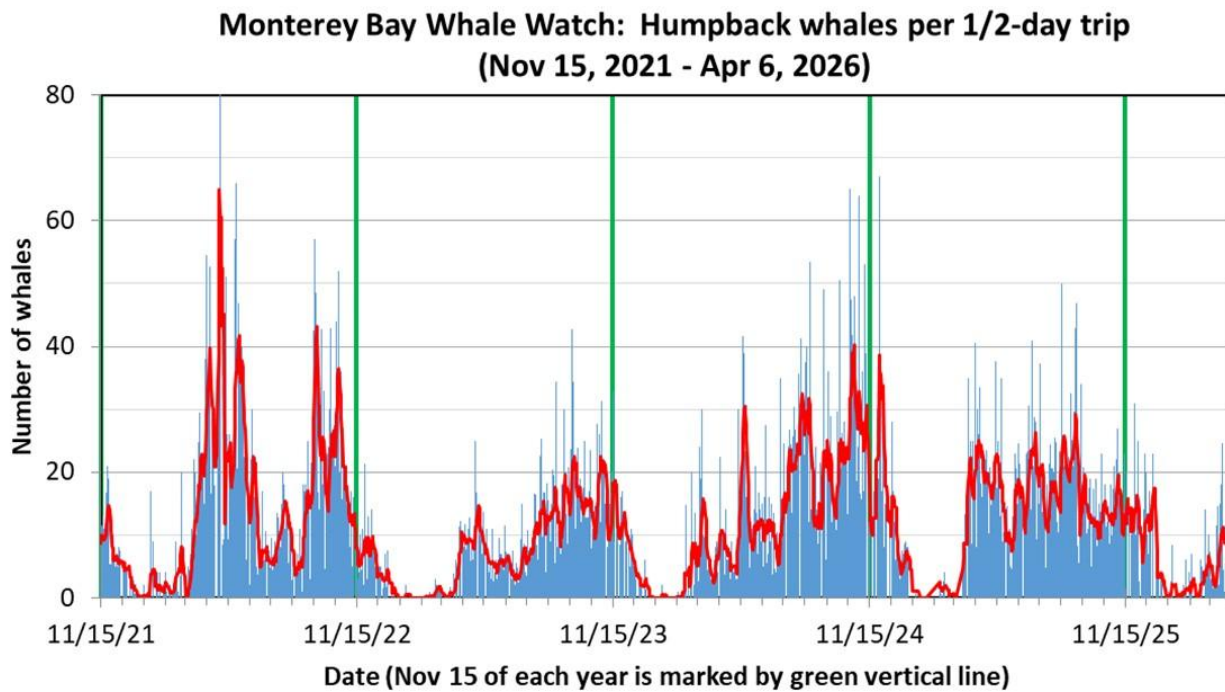


Figure 3. Standardized number of humpback whale sightings for Monterey Bay Whale Watch from 15 November 2021 – 6 April 2026. The y-axis is the number of whales per half-day trip; the thin blue bars are the average daily whale numbers, and the red line is a 7-day running average to make the patterns a 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 the Santa Barbara Channel during the seven-day period ending April 14, 2026.

<b>Fishing Zone</b>	<b>Number of humpback whales sighted</b>	<b>Number of blue whales sighted</b>
Zone 3	66	0
Zone 4	7	0
Santa Barbara Channel	43	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 lower than the historical average for this time of year (Figure 4).

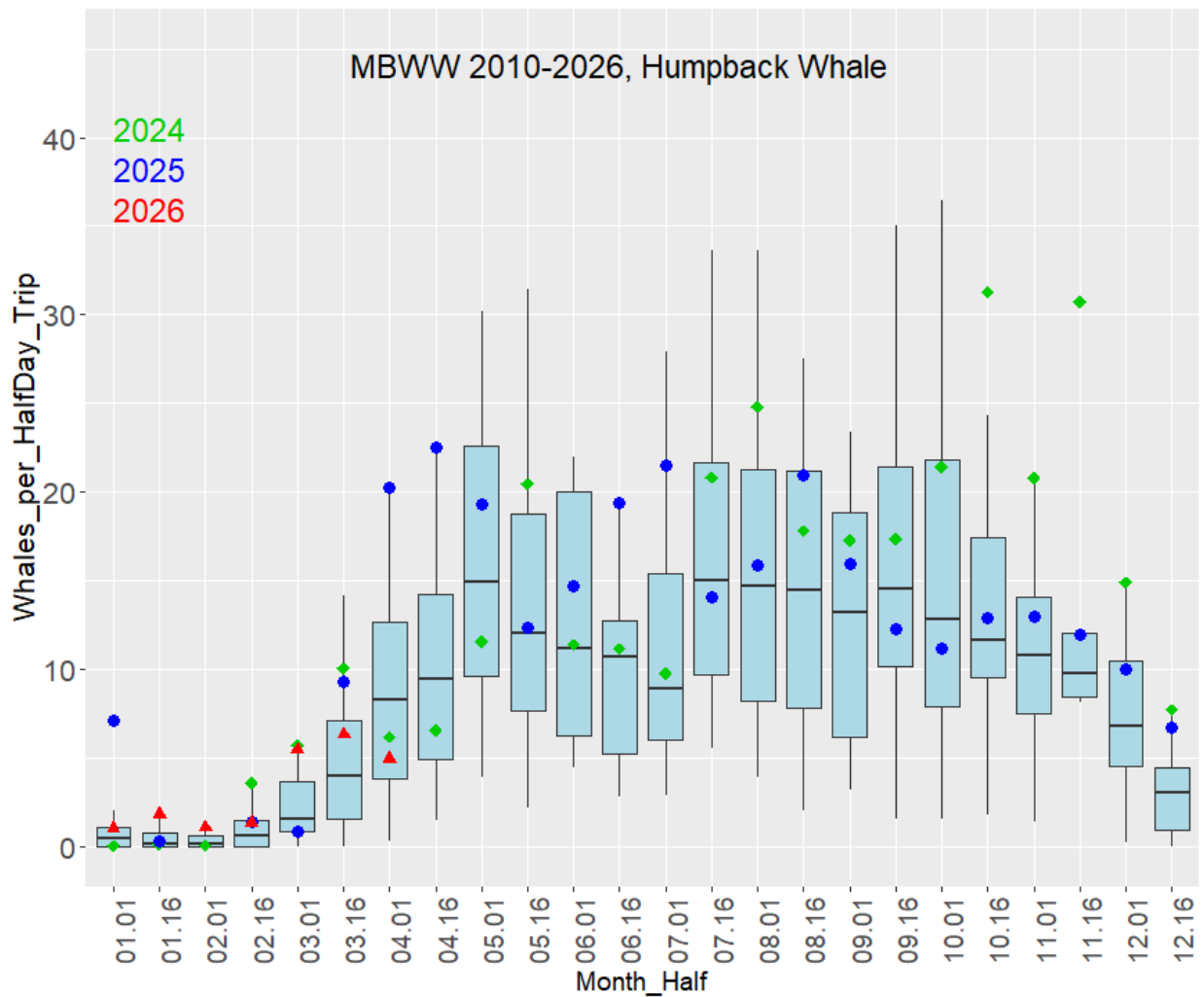


Figure 4. Historical Monterey Bay Whale Watch data for 2010-2026, summarizing the average and variation in the number of humpback whales per half-day trip on a semi-monthly basis (1st- 15th, 16th- end of month). This boxplot follows standard statistical practice in that the black horizontal line is the 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.

## C. Whale Watch 2.0 (All Fishing Zones)

Blue whale habitat predictions for April 8, 2026, show low habitat suitability in Fishing Zones 1-5, with a small pocket of suitable habitat in Fishing Zone 4 (Monterey Bay). Current habitat suitability can be accessed at [NOAA Coastwatch Habitat Suitability Map](#).

## 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. Summary below excludes any EFP or Alternative Gear landings.

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Value</b>
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	4,598
Total volume (pounds)	8,471,382
Total Ex-Vessel Value	\$41,781,145
Average unit price	\$5.30
Total number of active vessels	378
Maximum potential traps for entire season (based on active permits)	93,070

\* 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 5). 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

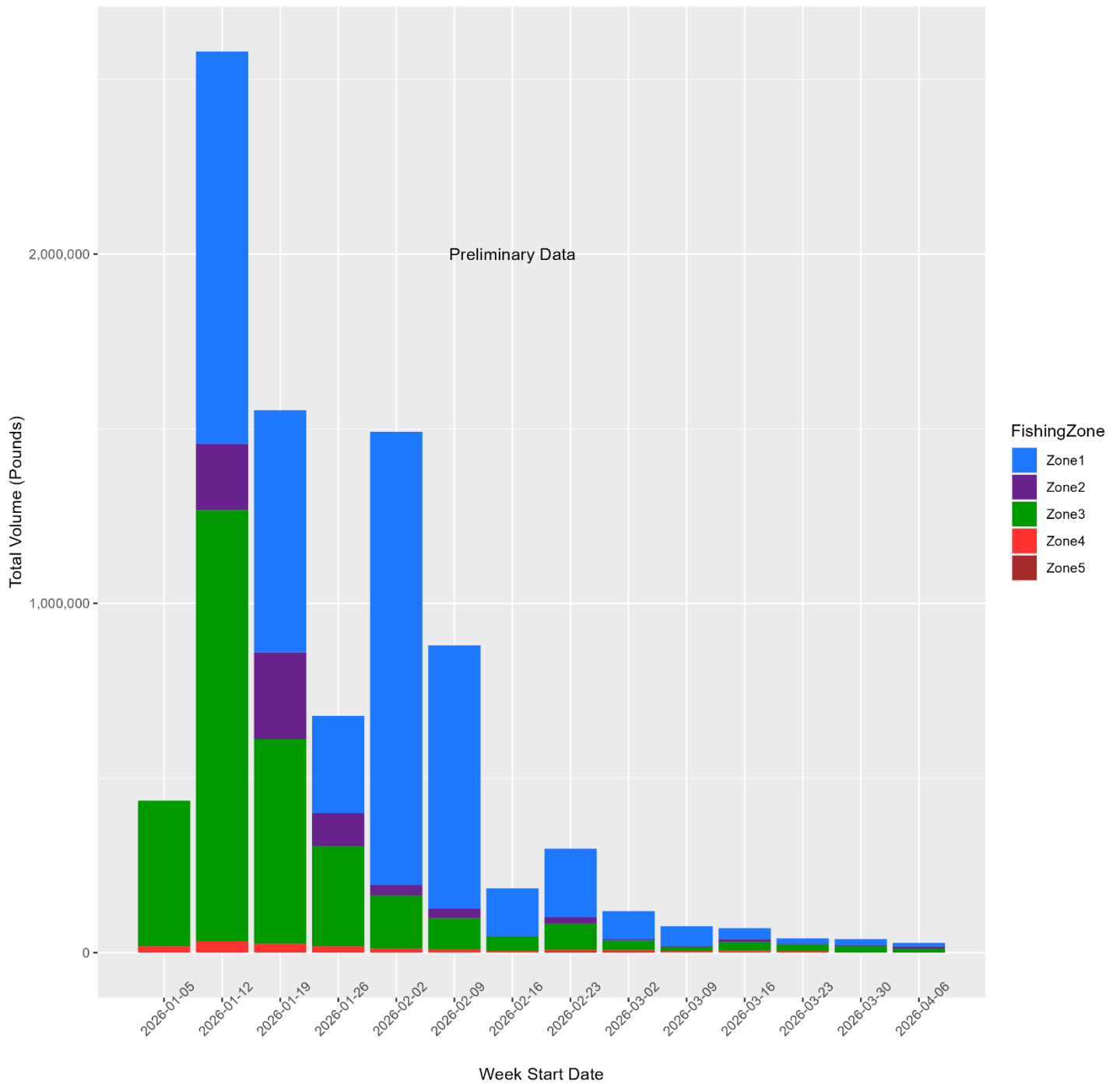


Figure 5. Volume (pounds) landed by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2026. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Certain week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

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 6). 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

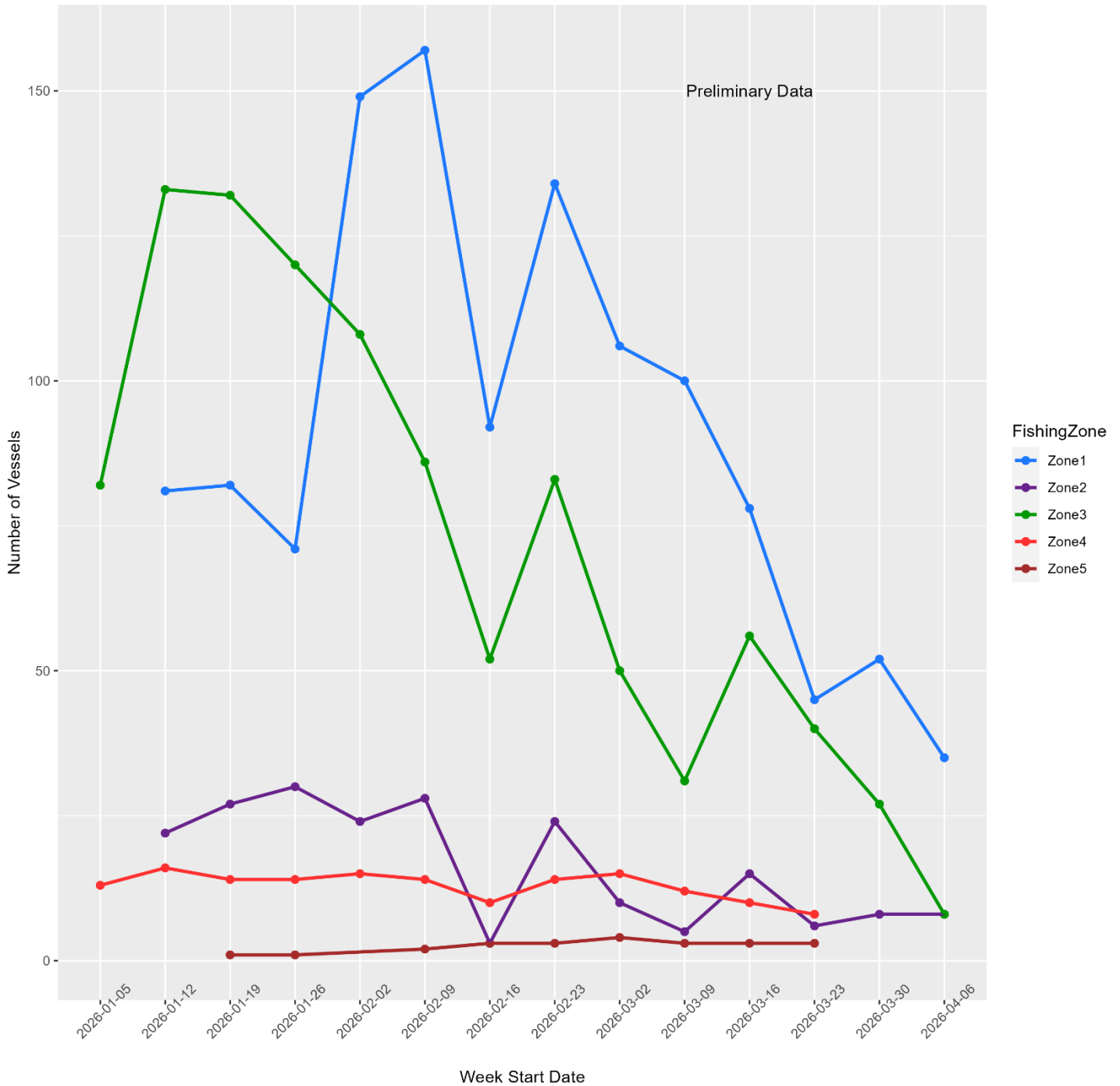


Figure 6. Number of active vessels by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2026. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Some week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

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

CDFW has received bi-weekly reports for this season starting on the first reporting period of January 16, 2026, through the most recent reporting period of April 1, 2026. A summary of reports received for April 1, 2026, is provided in Table 6 and a summary of traps deployed by Fishing Zone for each reporting period is provided in Table 7. Note that these summaries may not reflect all permitted vessels participating in the fishery due to compliance issues. During the most recent reporting period, approximately 70% of all traps reported were deployed in Fishing Zone 1 (Table 6). The highest number of traps deployed was during the February 16, 2026, reporting period (Table 7). CDFW has received 185 final reports with a total of 866 lost traps reported.

Table 6. Summary of information provided for the April 1, 2026, bi-weekly reporting period by Fishing Zone (1-5). Accessed from CDFW's Bi-Weekly Reporting database on April 9, 2026. NR-C refers to data withheld due to confidentiality. 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	97	250	22,025	13	32	95	169
Zone 2	23	153	3,075	14	34	60	6
Zone 3	47	141	5,788	20	35	87	73
Zone 4	9	153	615	13	22	42	16
Zone 5	NR-C	NR-C	NR-C	NR-C	NR-C	NR-C	NR-C
Totals	176	NA	31,503	NA	NA	NA	264

Table 7. Total reported traps deployed by Fishing Zone (1-5) for the most recent six bi-weekly reporting periods. 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	Apr 1 - Total Traps
Zone 1	23,409	44,958	54,398	46,304	33,713	22,025
Zone 2	4,824	6,622	6,797	3,975	2,925	3,075
Zone 3	22,535	2,1469	18,138	13,390	8,680	5,788
Zone 4	2,055	2,698	2,337	2,610	1,497	615
Zone 5	NR-C	NR-C	340	395	476	NR-C
Totals	52,823	75,747	82,010	66,674	47,291	31,503

### III. Distribution and abundance of key forage: §132.8(d)(7)

#### A. MBARI Krill Model

Modeled zooplankton conditions for March 2026 indicate lower than expected concentrations in Fishing Zones 1-5. Current data can be accessed from the [MBARI webpage](#).

#### IV. Ocean conditions: §132.8(d)(8)

##### **A. El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic**

As of April 9, 2026, ENSO neutral conditions are present and are favored through April-June 2026 (80% chance). In May-July 2026, El Niño is likely to emerge (61% 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.

##### **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.

## **APPENDIX I: Alternative Gear Activity**

Alternative Gear activity began on April 3, 2026, in Fishing Zones 4-5. As of April 13, 2026, 13 vessels have deployed or retrieved Alternative Gear. Landings data show five unique landings for a total of 2,016 pounds landed for a total ex-vessel value of \$16,573. The average unit price is \$8.00 per pound.