



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

Date: April 17, 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 April 14, 2026, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on April 15, 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 and implement a 30-fathom depth constraint, effective April 30, 2026, at 6 p.m.
- Fishing Zone 3: Fishery Closure effective April 30, 2026, at 6 p.m., and authorization of Alternative Gear effective May 7, 2026, at 7 a.m.
- 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

II. 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 implement a 30-fathom Depth Constraint effective April 30, 2026, at 6p.m. For Fishing Zone 3, Marine Region's final recommendation is a Fishery Closure effective April 30, 2026, at 6p.m., and the authorization of Alternative Gear effective May 7, 2026, at 7a.m.

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, recent increases in humpback whale abundance in concentrated areas, spring entanglement history, and anticipated increased fishing effort in some areas of the Fishing Grounds.

In Fishing Zone 3, recent observations of 66 humpback whales by Point Blue Conservation Science researchers at the Farallon Islands were recorded on April 13, 2026. This is a sharp increase in humpback whale numbers since the CDFW aerial survey on April 8, 2026, across Fishing Zone 3. Reported forage and ocean conditions this year are unusual compared to recent years, and humpback whales appear to be highly concentrated based on available prey. Modeled zooplankton conditions are lower than expected for this time of year, suggesting increased patchiness in prey availability which is likely influencing humpback whale distribution patterns. In addition, fishing effort is expected to increase over the coming weeks based on market conditions, especially in Fishing Zone 3, thereby increasing the co-occurrence of vertical lines and humpback whales.

In Fishing Zones 1 and 2, given the foraging patterns of observed humpback whales in adjacent Fishing Zones, precautionary measures are necessary to minimize entanglement risk as humpback whales continue their northward migration. A 30-fathom Depth Constraint will allow fishing opportunities to continue in Fishing Zones 1 and 2, while shifting the distribution of crab traps closer inshore to reduce potential interaction with whales as their numbers are expected to increase in the coming weeks.

Furthermore, entanglements have been consistently reported from Fishing Zones 4 and 5, and more recently Zone 1, during the spring months (April through June). While it is often not possible to confirm the gear set location, several in-season entanglements have been traced back to gear lost in these Fishing Zones during spring months.

For the current fishing season, Alternative Gear authorization will begin a week following the closure of the traditional season for law enforcement operational needs. This measure is especially important as this is the first year Alternative Gear is authorized for use in California waters, necessitating a precautionary approach to understand and evaluate the transition from traditional gear to Alternative Gear. The start dates of future Alternative Gear use will be reviewed annually before any future authorization.

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 type and origin are unknown.

Marine Life Concentrations: Observations from the Farallon Islands by Point Blue Conservation Science researchers observed 66 humpback whales over the last seven days with one single day observation on April 13, 2026, recording 64 humpback whales. These observations are made hourly by trained researchers stationed on Southeast Farallon Island. 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.

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of the [April 14, 2026 Available Data & Preliminary Assessment document](#).

III. 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.