

2025-2026 Risk Assessment

Available Data for Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Last updated: May 11, 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 May 13, 2026.

Recommended Management Actions

Commercial Fishery:

- Fishing Zones 1-2: Continue 15% Gear Reduction and 30-fathom Depth Constraint.
- Fishing Zones 3-5: Season Closed (Alternative Gear authorized)

Recreational Fishery:

- Fishing Zone 3: Crab Trap Prohibition, effective May 22, 2026, at 6p.m.
- 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 and 30-fathom Depth Constraint in Fishing Zones 1-2.

For the recreational fishery, Marine Region recommends implementing a Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zone 3, effective May 22, 2026, at 6p.m., and continuing the Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 4-5 and a Fleet Advisory for all Fishing Zones.

The commercial fishery closed in Fishing Zone 3 on April 30, 2026, and Alternative Gear was authorized 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.

These recommendations are supported by current Marine Life Concentrations, historical migration patterns and existing Management Actions already in place for Fishing Zones 1-2. In addition, fishing effort is continuing to decline in Fishing Zones 1-2, thereby decreasing the co-occurrence of vertical lines and humpback whales across open Fishing Zones. The number of permits reporting in Fishing Zones 1-2 during the May 1, 2026 reporting period (56 permits) continues to decline since the April 16, 2026 reporting period (79 permits).

The Gear Reduction and Depth Constraint will provide entanglement risk reduction as humpback whales continue to arrive from their winter breeding grounds. The recreational Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zone 3 will further reduce the number of vertical lines present in the water where humpback whales are present, thereby reducing entanglement risk in that Zone. 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 are expected to increase. The next risk assessment is expected to occur on or around June 1, 2026.

Entanglements: A humpback whale entanglement was reported on May 3, 2026, off Moss Landing. The reporting party observed the whale trailing a yellow polyball over a half an hour, then the whale appeared to self-release. The entanglement is still being reviewed by NMFS but is believed to be recreational crab trap gear and therefore will not be considered pursuant to RAMP regulations.

Marine Life Concentrations: CDFW aerial survey on May 4, 2026, observed 14 humpback whales and 5 unidentified whales in Fishing Zone 3. A joint USCG/CDFW aerial survey observed no Actionable Species on May 5, 2026, in Fishing Zone 1. A CDFW aerial survey on May 8, 2026, observed one humpback whale in Fishing Zone 1 and one humpback whale in Fishing Zone 2.

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of this Available Data document.

II. Alternative Management Actions for the Commercial Fishery

Alternatives Considered but Rejected

- Fishery Closure for Fishing Zones 1 and 2- 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 1.00 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 27, 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. Note: * denotes entanglement is still under review by NMFS.

Entanglement ID	Date	Species	Fishery	Score
20260503Mn	05/03/26	Humpback whale	Recreational gear*	NA
20260426Mn	04/26/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260410Mn	04/10/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260228Mn	02/28/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25
20260208Mn	02/08/26	Humpback whale	Unknown	0.25

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.

Fishing Zone	CDFW-approved survey data	Triggers attained?
Zone 1	USCG/CDFW Aerial Survey, CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 2	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 3	CDFW Aerial Survey	Yes
Zone 4	Season Closed	NA
Zone 5	Season Closed	NA

A. CDFW Aerial Surveys (Fishing Zones 1-3)

On May 4, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey in Fishing Zone 3 (Figure 1). CDFW flew the inshore-offshore transect lines between Davenport and Pt. Reyes, with transects running between the coast and the roughly 200-meter depth contour line at an altitude of 1000 ft. Skies were mostly clear with some patchy clouds. Sea conditions ranged between Beaufort states 1 and 2. Observer staff recorded 14 humpback whales and 5 unidentified whales in Zone 3 during the survey.

On May 8, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey in Fishing Zones 1-2 (Figure 2). CDFW flew the zigzag transect line from the Oregon border to Point Arena between the coast and the 100-meter depth contour line at an altitude of 1000 ft. Skies were overcast in Zone 1 and patchy cloud cover was observed in Zone 2 with skies clearing from Cape Mendocino to Westport and again around Point Arena. Cloud cover was higher than the survey altitude and did not obstruct visibility. In Fishing Zone 1, seas were mostly calm and ranged between Beaufort states 1 and 2. The wind increased around Cape Mendocino and from Fort Bragg to Point Arena with Beaufort states ranging between 3 and 4. Observers recorded one humpback whale in Fishing Zone 1 and one humpback whale in Fishing Zone 2.

Table 3. Counts of Actionable Species seen by CDFW aerial survey conducted on May 4 and 8, 2026.

Survey Date	Fishing Zone	Humpback whales	Unidentified whales
5/8	Zone 1	1	0
5/8	Zone 2	1	0
5/4	Zone 3	14	5

CDFW Aerial Survey - May 4, 2026

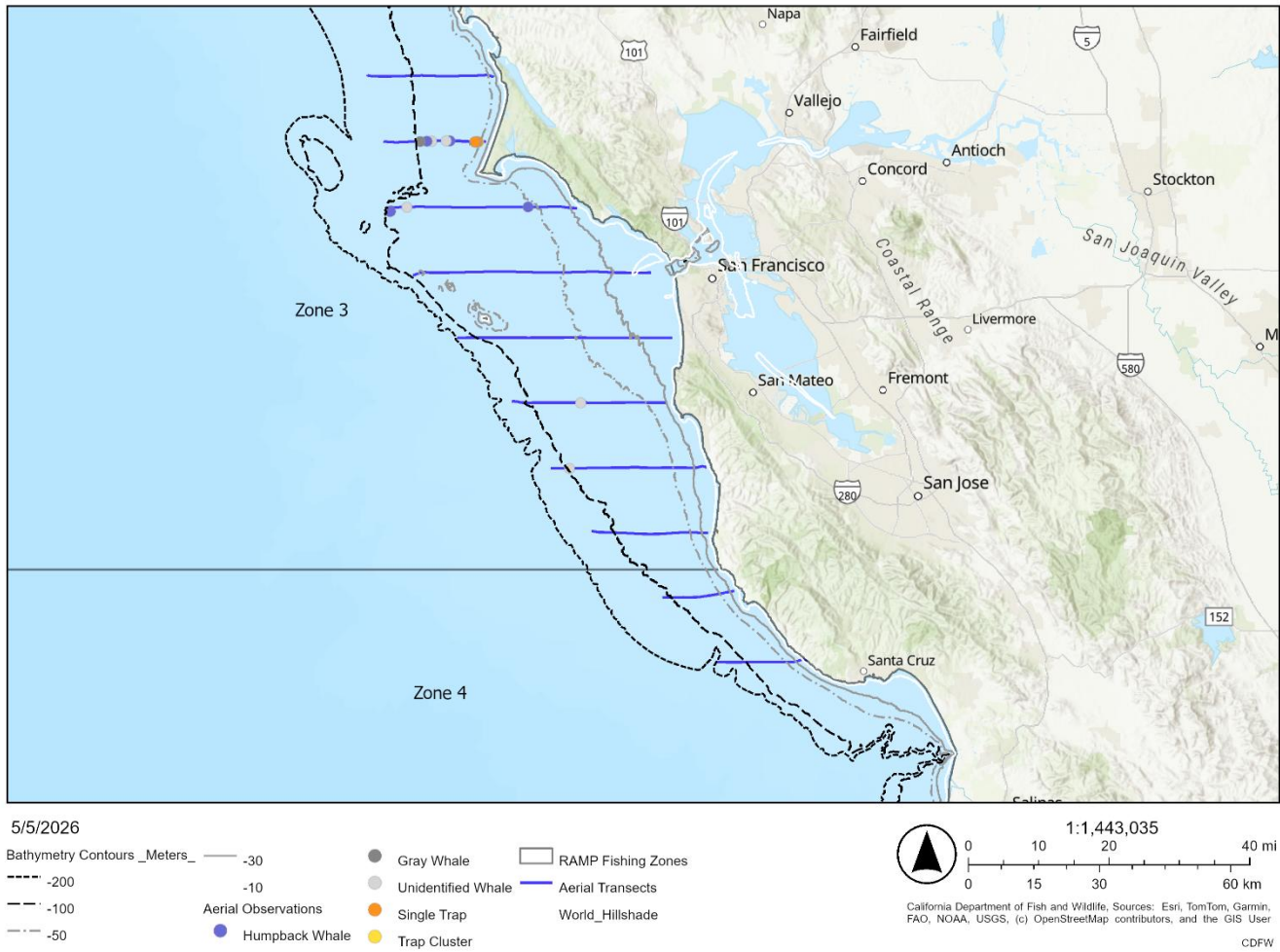


Figure 1. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zone 3 on May 4, 2026.

CDFW Aerial Survey - May 8, 2026

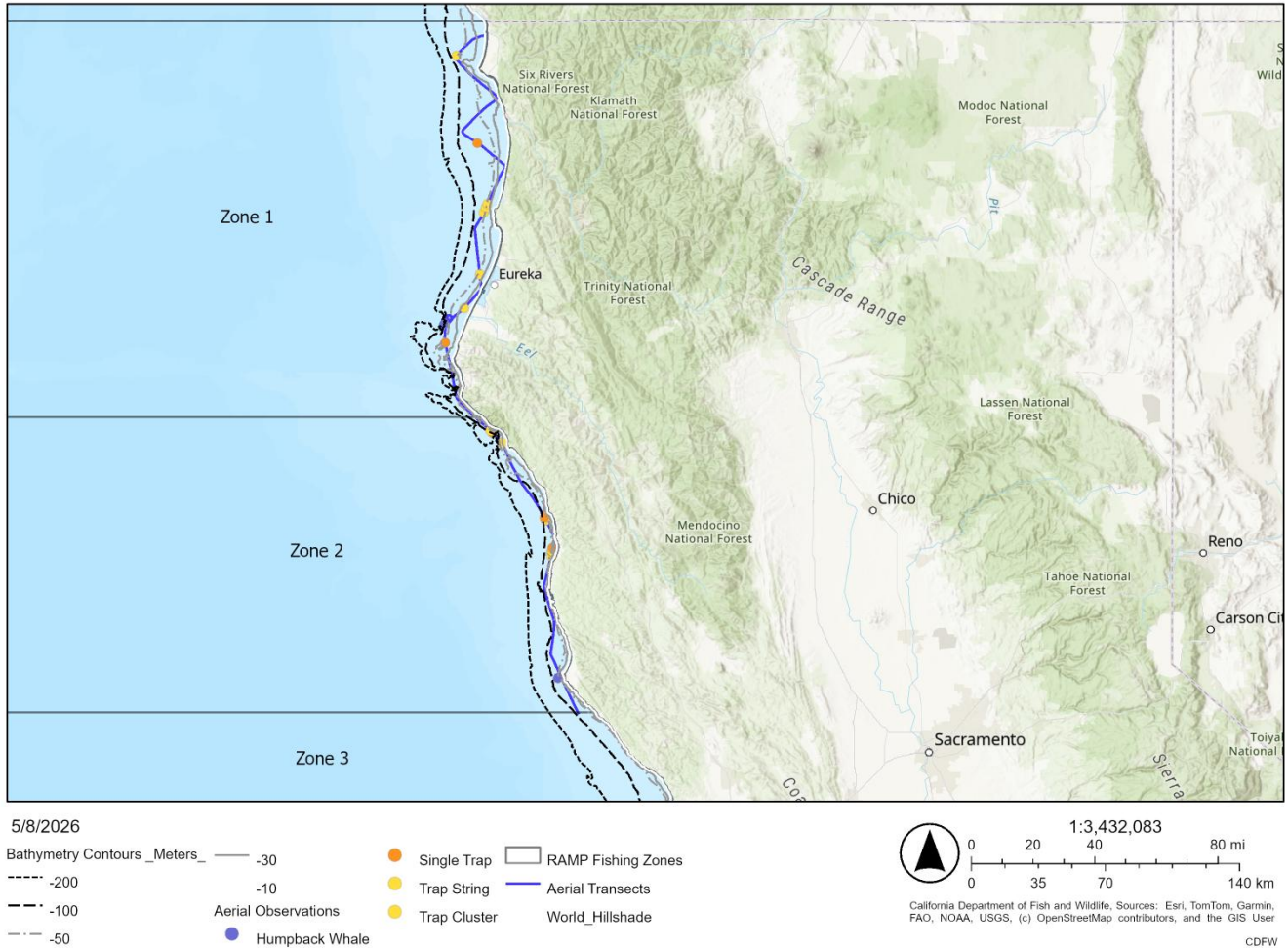


Figure 2. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zone 2 1-2 on May 8, 2026.

B. Joint US Coast Guard/CDFW Aerial Surveys (Fishing Zone 1)

On May 5, 2026, CDFW on a U.S Coast Guard helicopter conducted an aerial survey in Fishing Zone 1 between the CA-OR border and Cape Mendicino. The survey was flown along the 20-fathom curve line at 300-1000 feet altitude (Figure 3). Wind conditions were consistent and light between 5-10 Knots along Humboldt and Del Norte coastline, (Beaufort state ranging 1-3). Visibility and ocean clarity was good with no Actionable Species observed during the survey.

USCG/CDFW Aerial Survey - May 5, 2026

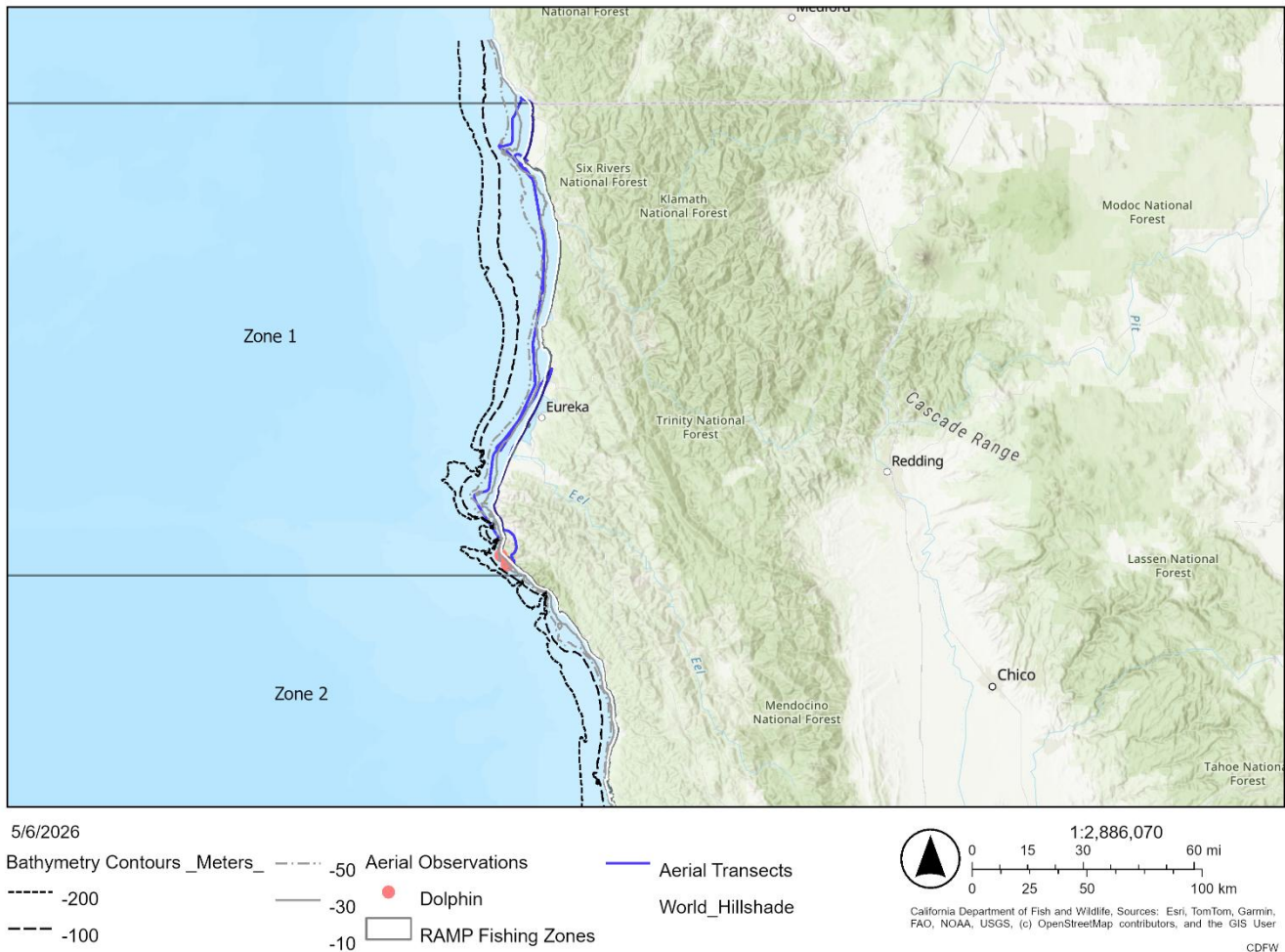


Figure 3. Map of US Coast Guard/CDFW aerial survey conducted in Fishing Zone 1 on May 5, 2026.

C. 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 April 29 – May 5, 2026. The 7-day average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip was 8.1, with a peak of 42 humpback whales observed during an all-day trip on May 2nd (Figure 4).

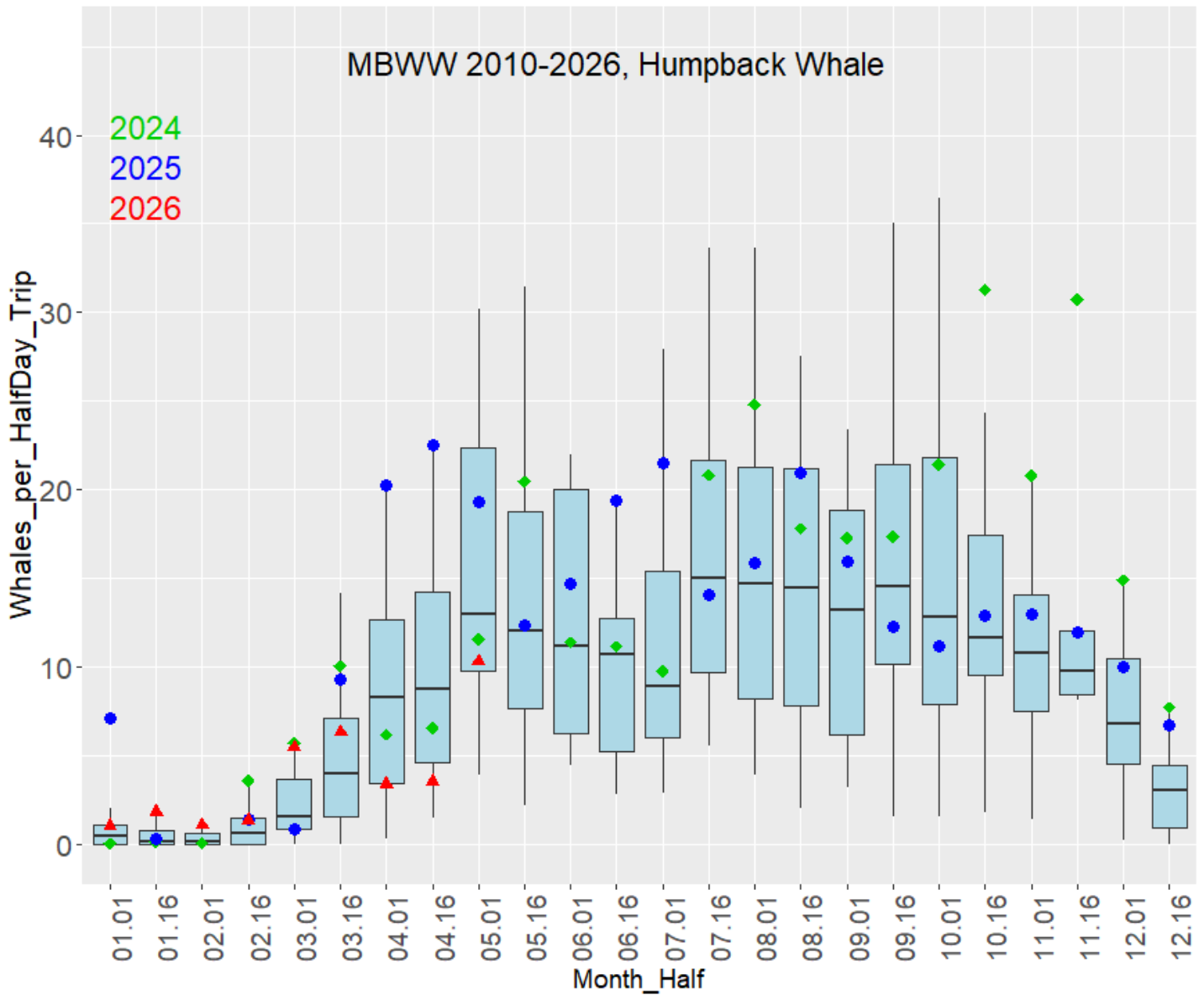


Figure 4. Standardized number of humpback whale sightings for Monterey Bay Whale Watch from November 15, 2021 – May 5, 2026. The y-axis is the number of whales per half-day trip; the thin blue bars are the average daily whale numbers, and the red line is a 7-day running average to make the patterns a 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. NOAA NMFS Rockfish Survey (Fishing Zone 3)

The NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Rockfish Recruitment and Ecosystem Assessment Survey is underway aboard the FSV Reuben Lasker conducting the annual spring survey in the California Current that estimates young-of-the-year (YOY) rockfish abundance. The survey runs from April 25-June 11, 2026. On May 7, 2026, observers onboard counted 163 humpback whales while conducting surveys from offshore Farallon Islands up to the Fort Ross trawl region, criss-crossing around Bodega Canyon.

B. 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 May 7, 2026.

Fishing Zone	Number of humpback whales sighted	Number of blue whales sighted
Zone 3	0	0
Zone 4	3	0
Santa Barbara Channel	28	4

C. Monterey Bay Whale Watch (Fishing Zone 4)

The semi-monthly average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip in southern Monterey Bay slightly below the historical average for this time of year (Figure 5). Additionally, a single blue whale was observed during five separate trips conducted April 25-30, 2026. It is unknown whether some or all of the observations were the same whale.

**Monterey Bay Whale Watch: Humpback whales per 1/2-day trip
(Nov 15, 2021 - May 5, 2026)**

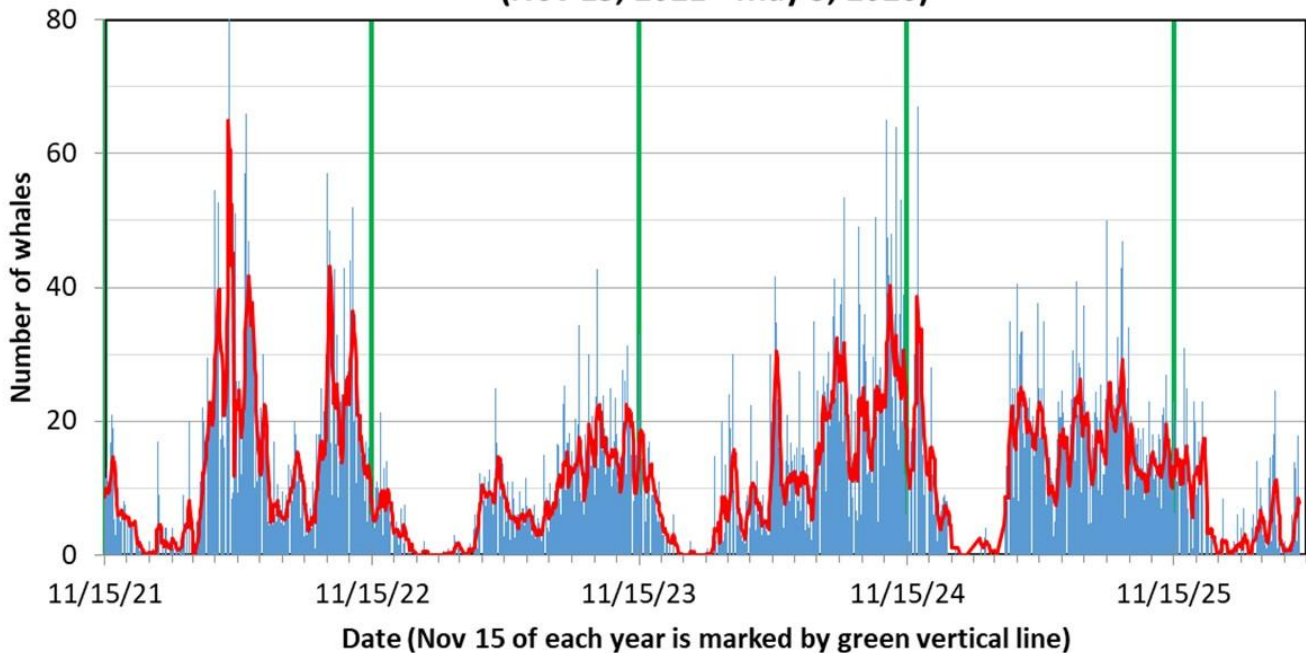


Figure 5. Historical Monterey Bay Whale Watch data for 2010-2026, summarizing the average and variation in the number of humpback whales per half-day trip on a semi-monthly basis (1st- 15th, 16th- end of month). This boxplot follows standard statistical practice in that the black horizontal line is the 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.

D. Whale Watch 2.0 (All Fishing Zones)

Blue whale habitat predictions for May 6, 2026, show low habitat suitability in Fishing Zones 1-4, some suitable habitat in Fishing Zone 5, and high habitat suitability south of Fishing Zone 5 to the US-Mexico border. 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 and 30-fathom Depth Constraint. Fishing Zone 3 closed on April 30, 2026, with authorized Alternative Gear beginning May 7, 2026. 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 May 8, 2026.

Metric	Value
Season status	Zones 1-2 are under a 15% Gear Reduction & 30-fathom Depth Constraint; Zones 3-5 are closed; open to Alternative Gear
Number of landings	4,897
Total volume (pounds)	8,600,959
Total Ex-Vessel Value	\$42,805,693
Average unit price	\$5.43
Total number of active vessels	376
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 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

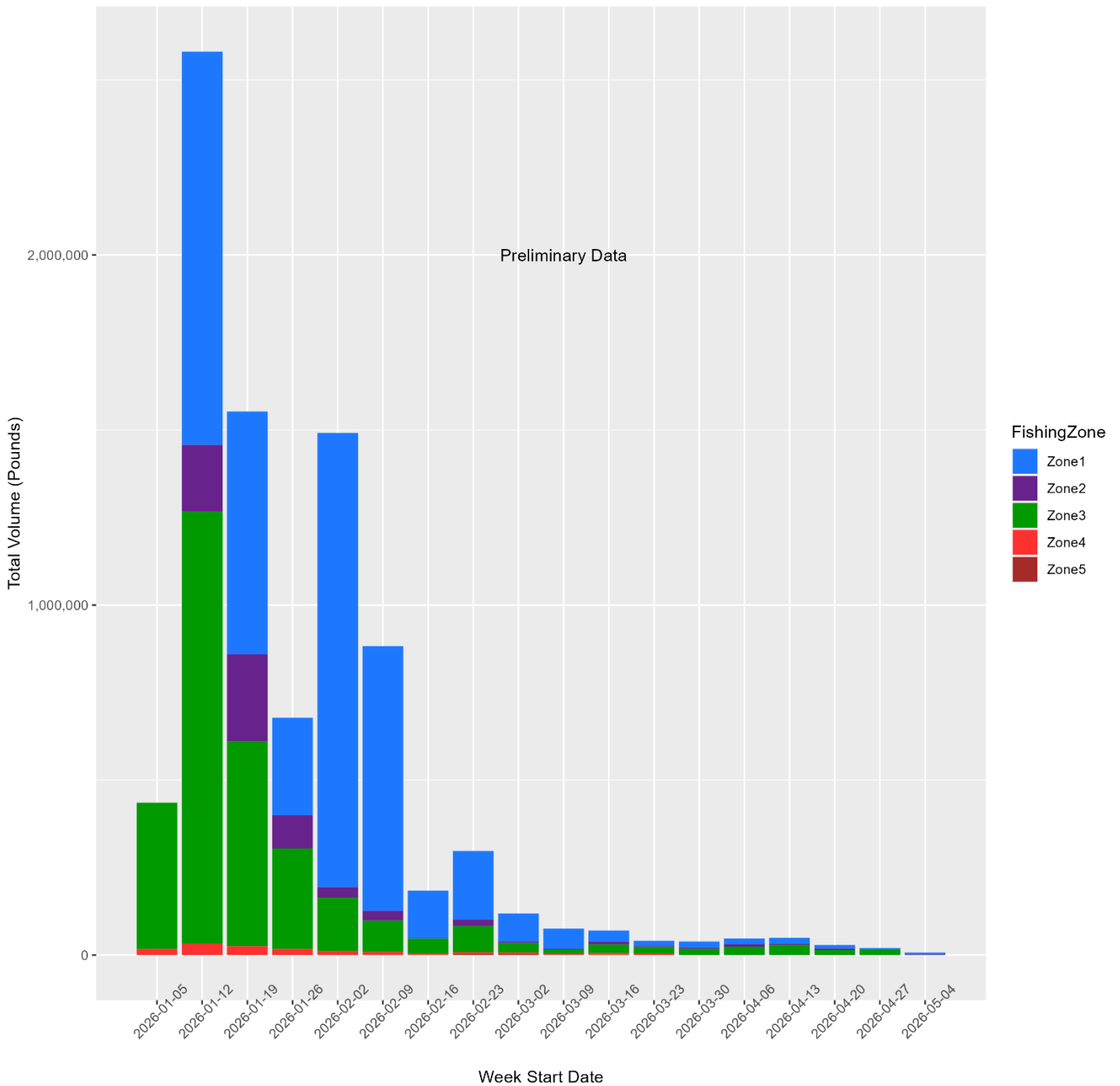


Figure 6. Volume (pounds) landed by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2024. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Certain week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

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

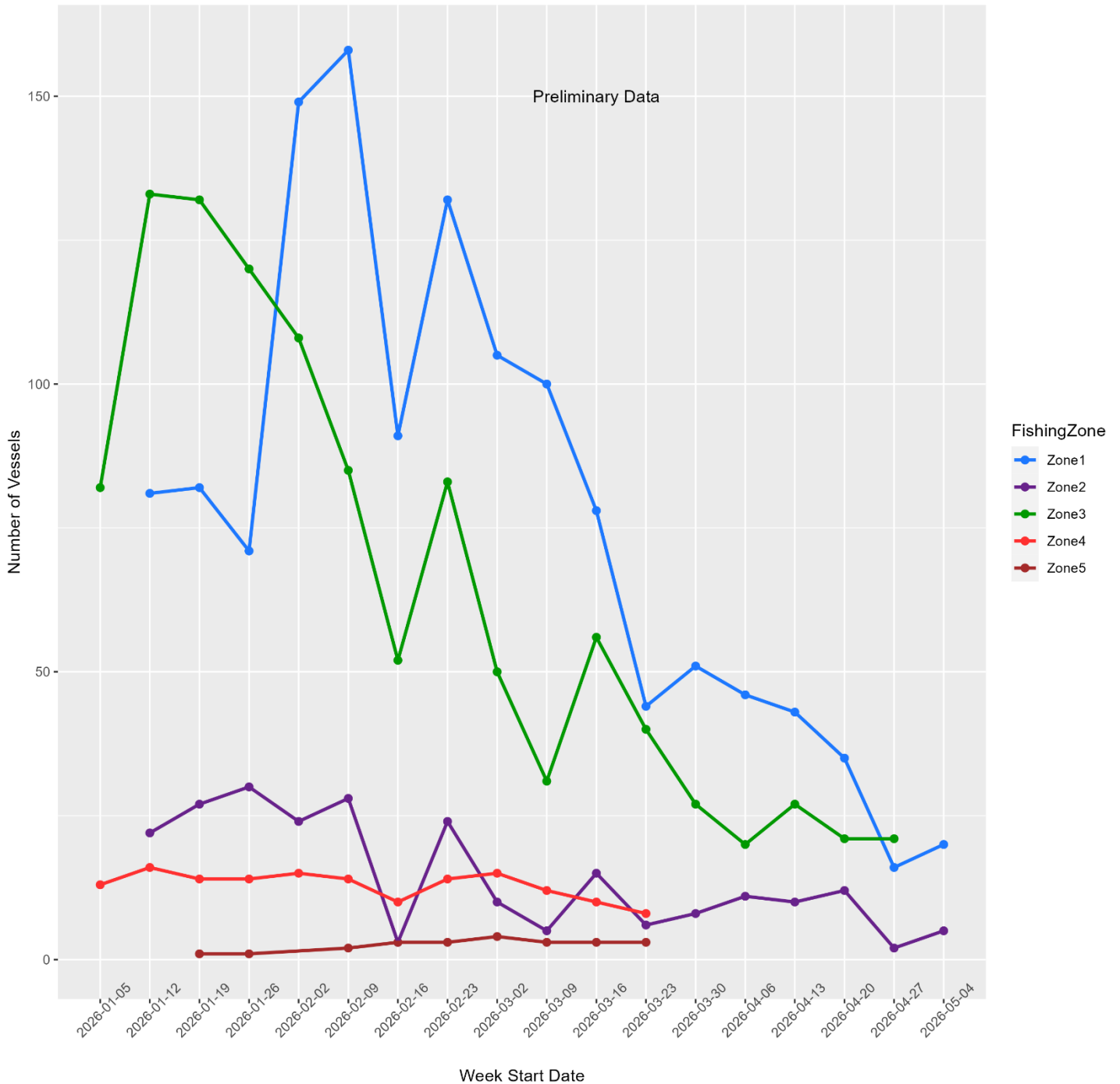


Figure 7. Number of active vessels by week and Fishing Zone. Week 1 starts with the first day the commercial Dungeness crab fishery was open in any area, January 5, 2024. All data are preliminary and subject to change. Some week-Fishing Zone combinations are withheld due to confidentiality constraints.

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

CDFW has received bi-weekly reports for this season starting on the first reporting period of January 16, 2026, through the most recent reporting period of May 1, 2026. A summary of reports received for May 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. CDFW has received 262 final reports with a total of 1,239 lost traps reported.

Table 6. Summary of information provided for the May 1, 2026, bi-weekly reporting period by Fishing Zone (1-5). Accessed from CDFW's Bi-Weekly Reporting database on May 7, 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	39	231	7,870	11	23	42	49
Zone 2	17	121	1,824	13	26	55	7
Zone 3	25	168	2,696	20	44	80	54
Zone 4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Zone 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	85	NA	13,211	NA	NA	NA	122

Table 7. Total reported traps deployed in each Fishing Zone for the most recent six bi-weekly reporting periods. All data are preliminary and subject to change.

Fishing Zone	Feb 16 - Total Traps	Mar 1 - Total Traps	Mar 16 - Total Traps	Apr 1 - Total Traps	Apr 16 - Total Traps	May 1 - Total Traps
Zone 1	54,398	46,304	35,623	25,944	13,875	7,870
Zone 2	6,797	4,185	3,135	3,224	2,673	1,824
Zone 3	18,138	13,390	9,266	7,063	5,039	2,696
Zone 4	2,337	2,610	1,497	1,070	586	821
Zone 5	340	395	536	173	0	0
Totals	82,010	66,884	50,057	37,474	22,173	13,211

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

A. MBARI Krill Model

Modeled zooplankton conditions for April 2026 indicate lower than expected concentrations along the California coast, except for a pocket of slightly above average conditions between Point Arena and Point Sur (Fishing Zones 3 and 4). Current data can be accessed from the [MBARI webpage](#).

IV. Ocean conditions: §132.8(d)(8)

A. El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic

No new available data. Please see the [April 14 Available Data and Preliminary Assessment document](#) or visit the [NOAA ENSO Diagnostic webpage](#) more information.

B. Large Marine Heatwave Tracker

As of April 14, 2026, current coastal sea surface temperatures are among the warmest ever seen for this time of year and have remained anomalously high since early December. It remains to be seen if these coastal warm anomalies continue into spring (typically by mid-April) when seasonal upwelling should lead to cold coastal anomalies.

Late March to early April did see some upwelling and cooling, however, as of this update, current wind patterns are still not welling-favorable, thus allowing warmer-than-normal waters to persist in some regions.

Coastal ocean temperatures along the U.S. West Coast currently look similar to what we typically see during an El Niño; however, these temperature anomalies are driven by the marine heatwave and are not a result of the El Niño, which not yet fully developed for our region. We therefore anticipate the combined influence of these phenomena on coastal temperatures during the fall and winter of 2026. Please visit 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 and on May 7, 2026, in Fishing Zone 3. As of May 8, 2026, 67 vessels have deployed or retrieved Alternative Gear. Landings data show 58 unique landings for a total of 19,207 pounds landed for a total ex-vessel value of \$157,655. The average unit price is \$7.06 per pound.