



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

Date: May 15, 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 May 12, 2026, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on May 13, 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 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

II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial fishery, Marine Region's final 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.

Note: 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 for the commercial fishery.

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 the [May 12, 2026 Available Data document](#).

III. 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.