



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

Date: June 18, 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 June 12, 2026, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on June 16, 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 Zones 3-5: 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 continuing the Crab Trap Prohibition in Fishing Zones 3-5 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, declining fishing effort, historical migration patterns and existing Management Actions already in place for Fishing Zones 1-2. Fishing effort continues to decrease in Fishing Zones 1-2, thereby reducing 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 June 1, 2026 reporting period was 23 permits (Zone 1 reporting 13 permits, Zone 2 reporting 10 permits), a reduction from the May 16, 2026 reporting period from 41 permits in both Zones. Furthermore, the observed humpback whales in Fishing Zone 1 were observed further offshore in depths of approximately 150 meters (82 fathoms), while fishing effort is currently constrained to depths shallower than 30 fathoms, with the average max depth fished in Zone 1 of 24 fathoms.

Available data and current Management Actions (Gear Reduction and Depth Constraint) in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 provide sufficient entanglement risk reduction through the end of the statutory season (July 15, 2026) as humpback whales continue to migrate through those Zones. Given the offshore location of observed whales, limited fishing effort and the depths where commercial activity is occurring, entanglement risk is considered to be low and will continue to decline through the end of the statutory season.

Entanglements: Two humpback whale entanglements were reported since the last Risk Assessment. On May 24, 2026, a mom/calf humpback whale pair were observed swimming closely together with a small trailing yellow buoy. Entanglement responders were able to document what appears to be a self-release, where the whale was able to break the line. The buoy and line were recovered and will be turned over to CDFW for investigation. 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. A second entanglement was reported on May 25, 2026, off Moss Landing by a whale watch vessel. The whale appeared to be trailing a single orange and yellow bullet buoy closely behind the whale. Photo documentation of the fluke shows a purple and black line and the entanglement is still under investigation by NMFS. Entanglement responders were unable to locate the animal and it is presumed still entangled.

Marine Life Concentrations: CDFW aerial surveys on June 8-9, 2026, observed 26 humpback whales in Fishing Zone 1, and one humpback whale and one unidentified whale in Fishing Zone 2. A joint USCG/CDFW aerial survey was conducted on June 9, 2026, and observed 27 unidentified whales in Fishing Zone 1.

For additional details, see the Entanglement and Marine Life Concentration sections of the [June 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 fishing effort in Fishing Zones 1 and 2 and the depths where humpback whales were observed, it was not the recommended Management Action at this time.