

## Committee Staff Summary for July 16, 2026 MRC

**5. Commercial Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Management****Today's Item****Information** ☒**Action** ☐

Receive and discuss a Department overview of a range of potential management measures, building on regulations adopted in 2025-2026, to further reduce whale entanglement risk in the coonstripe shrimp fishery.

**Summary of Previous/Future Actions**

- Department notified Marine Resources Committee (MRC) of coonstripe shrimp fishery concern November 6-7, 2024; MRC
- Commission approved emergency regulations to amend Section 180.15; referred topic to MRC February 12-13, 2025
- Department update and MRC discussion March 13, 2025; MRC
- MRC received Department-recommended regulation changes; MRC developed recommendation July 16-17, 2025; MRC
- Approved MRC recommendation for *regular rulemaking*; received update on development of rulemaking; held public notice hearing August 2025; October 2025; December 2025
- Commission approved regulations in *regular rulemaking* February 11-12, 2026
- **Today, receive and discuss a Department overview of a range of potential management measures, building on regulations adopted in 2025-2026, to further reduce whale entanglement risk** **July 16, 2026; MRC**
- Receive and discuss Department updates and recommended management measures, and potential MRC recommendation November 12, 2026; MRC

**Background**

The commercial fishery for coonstripe shrimp (*Pandalus danae*) is a small, open-access trap fishery operating under Commission regulations in Section 180.15. The fishery uses strings of traps connected to a groundline (also known as longline trap gear). In recent years, participation has increased, largely due to closures and limitations in other fisheries. This growth, particularly during peak whale migration, has increased marine mammal entanglement risk by adding more trap gear and vertical lines in the water.

In February 2025, following whale entanglements linked to the fishery, the Commission approved emergency regulations and referred the topic to MRC for further discussion. The emergency regulations were readopted twice, extending them for an additional 180 days (through April 3, 2026); no further extensions are possible under state law.

In March 2025, MRC heard input and discussed options for a regular rulemaking to ensure continuity of the emergency measures. At the July 2025 MRC meeting, the Department presented proposed coonstripe shrimp management measures for inclusion in a regular

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rulemaking. The measures incorporated and refined the emergency regulations and added voluntary use of pop-up gear, developed with input from stakeholders and fishermen. A number of additional potential measures to further minimize entanglement risk were also suggested and discussed; however, given the time needed to sufficiently develop the measures and continue engagement with the fleet and stakeholders, the Department recommended a two-phased management response, with a near-term focus on maintaining emergency restrictions and authorizing pop-up gear.

MRC supported the near- and long-term strategy for the fishery as proposed by the Department. Accordingly, MRC recommended that the Commission initiate a regular rulemaking to incorporate the emergency regulations, Department-proposed updates and additional regulatory measures, and potential buoy size and trap-destruction device requirements. MRC also recommended that the Commission support the Department's plan to explore longer-term entanglement risk reduction measures (identified on the MRC work plan as phases 1 and 2). The Commission approved the two-phase approach at its August 2025 meeting.

The near-term "phase 1" regular rulemaking commenced at the December 2025 Commission meeting and was adopted in February 2026 (see exhibit 1 for background details). At the same meeting, the Commission supported launching the "phase 2" longer-term management review process, scheduled for July 2026 (today).

### ***Today's Meeting***

Today, the Department will present an overview of longer-term considerations and options to enhance management and further reduce marine life entanglement risk from the commercial coonstripe shrimp fishery (Exhibit 2). The range of potential management measures — such as gear modifications, reducing co-occurrence with whales, in-season response options, and entanglement identification tools — are being designed to build on the regulations adopted in 2025–2026 and further strengthen efforts to minimize entanglement risk in this evolving fishery. The Department will also outline planned next steps, including continued outreach, further discussion, and a request for a potential MRC recommendation in November 2026.

### **Significant Public Comments**

1. Seven environmental non-governmental organizations urge MRC to recommend initiating a rulemaking to reduce whale entanglement risk in the commercial coonstripe fishery to adopt innovative fishing technologies. They recommend transitioning the southern fishery to pop-up (ropeless) gear over three years, authorizing the Department director, in consultation with Commission leadership, to temporarily close areas to vertical-line gear when warranted, and establishing limits on the number of vertical lines and buoyed endlines deployed. They also encourage strong and diverse stakeholder engagement and propose pathways to facilitate gear transition. The organizations emphasize that these actions would modernize the fishery while improving protection for marine wildlife. (Exhibit 3)

### **Recommendation (N/A)**

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### Exhibits

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 19, December 10-11, 2025 Commission meeting](#) (*for background purposes only*)
2. [Department presentation](#)
3. [Co-signed letter from representatives of Oceana, Endangered Habitats League, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ocean Defenders Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Resource Renewal Institute, and the Animal Welfare Institute,](#) received July 2, 2026

### Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

**Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025***For background purposes only***19. Commercial Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Regular Rulemaking****Today's Item**Information ☐Action ☒

Consider authorizing publication of notice of intent to amend regulations regarding the commercial coonstripe shrimp fishery.

**Summary of Previous/Future Actions**

- |                                                                                                                                 |                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Adoption hearing for <i>emergency regulations</i>                                                                             | February 12-13, 2025        |
| • Department presented the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) with proposed measures for a regular rulemaking; MRC recommendation | July 16-17, 2025; MRC       |
| • Approved MRC recommendation for <i>regular rulemaking</i>                                                                     | August 13-14, 2025          |
| • First readoption of <i>emergency regulations</i>                                                                              | August 13-14, 2025          |
| • Update on development of and timeline for <i>regular rulemaking</i>                                                           | October 8-9, 2025           |
| • Second readoption of <i>emergency regulations</i>                                                                             | December 10-11, 2025        |
| • <b>Today's notice hearing for <i>regular rulemaking</i></b>                                                                   | <b>December 10-11, 2025</b> |
| • Discussion and adoption hearing for <i>regular rulemaking</i>                                                                 | February 11-12, 2026        |

**Background**

The California commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery has experienced increased participation in recent years, largely due to closures and limitations in other fisheries. The increase in fishing activity, particularly during peak whale migration, has elevated the risk of marine animal entanglement by increasing the amount of trap gear and vertical lines in the water. Three recent humpback whale entanglements have been linked to this fishery, in direct conflict with California's goal of zero entanglement mortality.

In response to whale entanglements attributed to the commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery, the Commission approved emergency regulations in February 2025. The emergency regulations, aimed at reducing marine life entanglement risk, took effect on April 7, 2025. At its August 2025 meeting, the Commission approved a 90-day extension of the emergency regulations, which are set to expire in January 2026. A second, and final, 90-day extension is scheduled for consideration at today's meeting (Agenda Item 14).

To ensure continuity after the emergency regulations expire, Department and Commission staff developed draft documents for a regular rulemaking based on an MRC recommendation that the Commission approved in August. Department staff provided an update on this effort at the October 2025 Commission meeting, including an overview of additional proposed amendments (see background in Exhibit 1).

For today's meeting, the Department transmitted draft proposed amendments to regulations governing the commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery (exhibits 2 through 4).

**Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025***For background purposes only****Draft Proposed Regulations******Section 180.15 (emergency provisions carried into regular rulemaking)***

- Establishes a management boundary at the Sonoma/Mendocino counties line and management areas northward to the California/Oregon border, and southward to the United States/Mexico border.
- Defines "ground line" and imposes a limit on the number of traps per ground line: 15 in the northern fishery and 40 in the southern fishery.
- Defines "vertical line" and imposes a limit on the number of vertical lines per vessel: 180 in the northern fishery and 60 in the southern fishery.
- Sets a 30-fathom depth limit in the northern fishery only.
- Replaces the 2001 control date with a new date of February 13, 2025.
- Updates procedures for weather and hardship exemptions.

***Additional Section 180.15 Amendments (new)***

- Authorizes the voluntary use of pop-up fishing gear — in lieu of vertical lines attached to a surface buoy — and establishes conditions for its use.
- Redefines the fishing season based on the two new management areas and sets start dates and times corresponding to each area.
- Establishes minimum trap construction requirements for single- and multi-chamber traps, and buoy marking requirements.
- Prohibits take of non-coonstripe species and restricts possession of coonstripe shrimp during closed seasons.

***Section 180.2 (new)***

- Exempts coonstripe shrimp traps from destruct device requirements.

***Section 180.5 (new)***

- Replaces the requirement to mark buoys with the operator's commercial fishing license identification number with a new requirement to mark buoys with the vessel's commercial boat registration number.

***Benefits of Regulatory Amendments***

The newly-established limit on vertical lines per vessel (180 in the north and 60 in the south) provides an upper limit where none currently exists. While this cap may, in theory, authorize an increase for some operators, the fleet has historically operated within a range (70 to 180 in the north and 8 to 60 in the south). The combination of the longstanding variability, the newly-established upper limit, and the anticipated voluntary conversion to pop-up gear, is expected to result in a net reduction in vertical lines deployed over time. Each conversion of a traditional vertical line to pop-up gear directly reduces the number of persistent vertical lines in the water column.

**Staff Summary for December 10-11, 2025**  
*For background purposes only*

### Significant Public Comments

An environmental, non-governmental organization generally supports the proposed regulations, particularly the voluntary use of pop-up fishing gear. However, it expresses concern that current measures may not sufficiently reduce the level of entanglement risk, citing three entanglements from July 2024 through May 2025. The organization recommends three key amendments: (1) Prohibit use of floating (positively buoyant) ground lines, to further reduce entanglement risk; (2) adopt stronger protections in biologically important areas for federally-protected species (i.e., prohibit vertical lines); and (3) establish a concrete timeline for transitioning to mandatory pop-up gear. (Exhibit 7)

### Recommendation

**Commission staff:** Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend sections 180.15, 180.2 and 180.5, as recommended by the Department.

**Department:** Authorize publication of a notice of proposed regulations regarding the commercial coonstripe shrimp trap fishery.

### Exhibits

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 24, October 8-9, 2025 Commission meeting](#) (for background purposes only)
2. [Department memo](#), received November 24, 2025
3. [Draft initial statement of reasons and informative digest](#)
4. [Draft proposed regulatory language](#)
5. [Draft economic and fiscal impact statement](#) (STD 399)
6. [Department presentation](#)
7. [Letter from Francine Kershaw, Senior Scientist, Natural Resources Defense Council](#), received October 3, 2025

### Motion

Moved by \_\_\_\_\_ and seconded by \_\_\_\_\_ that the Commission authorizes publication of a notice of its intent to amend sections 180.15, 180.2 and 180.5, related to the commercial coonstripe shrimp fishery, as discussed today.



# Commercial Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Management

*July 16, 2026*

*Presented to:*

**Marine Resources Committee**  
**CA Fish and Game Commission**

*Presented by:*

**Brian Demars-Owens**  
Northern Invertebrate Project Supervisor  
**Marine Region**





# Fishery Background

- Open access longline trap fishery
- Open season May to October
- History of recent whale entanglements
- Emergency regulations enacted in 2025
- Certificate of Compliance in 2026







# Key Regulations Implemented - May 2026\*

| Topic                 | Current Regulations (May 2026) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Control Date          | Feb 13, 2025                   |
| Fishery Participation | Unrestricted                   |
| Vertical Line Limit   | North: 180<br>South: 60        |
| Traps/String Limit    | North: 15<br>South: 40         |
| Pop-Up Gear           | Voluntary with requirements    |
| Surface Gear          | Prohibit surface line          |
| Buoy Size Restriction | 4" diameter and 18" length     |

\*Not a complete list of the recent changes.



# Fishery Update

| 2025 Landings   | 2026 Landings to Date* |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 12 Vessels      | 8 Vessels              |
| 240,121 lbs     | 59,199 lbs             |
| \$2,109,923 EVV | \$474,093 EVV          |

\*data accessed June 17, 2026



# Previously Discussed Items

- Sinking groundlines
- “Hot spots”
- Transition to mandatory pop-up
- Surface gear modifications





# Future Management Options



# Management Measures

- Entanglement Risk
  - Gear modifications
  - Reductions in co-occurrence
- Inseason Response
- Entanglement Identification Tools



Photo: CDFW



# Entanglement Risk - Gear Considerations

| Management Option  | Outcome                                |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Pop-up buoys       | Reduce entanglements in vertical lines |
| Sinking groundline | Reduce entanglements in groundline     |



# Entanglement Risk - Reduction in Co-Occurrence

| Management Option | Outcome                                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Limited Entry     | Cap number of fishery participants.                          |
| Gear Endorsement  | Limit the number of vessels permitted to use vertical lines. |





# Entanglement Risk - Reduction in Co-Occurrence

| Management Option                                            | Outcome                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Restrict use of traditional gear to historical fishing areas | Prevent expansion of vertical lines in areas not previously fished |
| “Hot Spot” closures                                          | Reduce co-occurrence of whales and gear in an area                 |
| Further vertical line reductions                             | Reduce number of vertical lines and co-occurrence risk             |
| Reduced fishing season                                       | Reduce number of days of co-occurrence                             |



# Inseason Response

Grant Director of CDFW authority to implement limited measures in response to an entanglement.

Measures could include:

- Vertical line reductions
- Mandatory use of pop-up fishing gear
- Fishery closure



# Entanglement Identification Tools

| Management Option | Outcome                                                                                     |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Buoy Registration | Vessels register buoy colors and markings, helps to identify gear involved in entanglements |
| Line Marking      | Fishery specific line color, helps to identify gear involved in entanglements               |



## Next Steps

- Identify measures for further discussion and exploration
  - Gear endorsement
  - Transition to pop-up fishing gear
  - Director authority for inseason action
- Conduct outreach (summer/fall)
- Discussion and potential MRC recommendation (Nov)

# Thank You



[coonstripeshrimp@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:coonstripeshrimp@wildlife.ca.gov)



July 2, 2026

Samantha Murray, Co-Chair

Eric Sklar, Co-Chair

Marine Resources Committee

California Fish and Game Commission

Sacramento, California

**RE: Phase 2 Rulemaking for the California Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery**

Dear Chair and Members of the Marine Resources Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned conservation and marine wildlife organizations, we respectfully request that the Marine Resources Committee recommend that the California Fish and Game Commission initiate a rulemaking package for the California coonstripe shrimp fishery to reduce the risk of whale entanglements and modernize fishery operations through the adoption of innovative fishing technologies.

Specifically, we request the Commission take prompt action to reduce whale entanglements by initiating a rulemaking process to:

1. Transition the Southern coonstripe shrimp fishing zone from conventional vertical-line trap gear to pop-up (ropeless) gear over a three-year implementation period;
2. Authorize the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in consultation with the Executive Director of the Fish and Game Commission, to temporarily close coonstripe shrimp fishing zones to the use of vertical-line gear when whale entanglement risk warrants management action; and
3. Establish measures to limit and reduce the total number of vertical lines deployed in the coonstripe shrimp fishery, including through a cap on the number of buoyed endlines associated with trap strings.

California has established itself as a national leader in addressing the risk that fixed-gear fisheries pose to whales and other protected marine species. As populations of humpback whales, blue whales, other large whales, and leatherback sea turtles increasingly overlap with commercial fishing activity along the California coast, the state has adopted precautionary measures in several fisheries - including the coonstripe shrimp fishery - to reduce entanglement risk. The next phase of rulemaking for the coonstripe shrimp fishery presents an opportunity to build on this progress.

The use of conventional buoyed trap gear requires persistent vertical lines in the water column and on the surface, which are the primary mechanism by which large whales and other wildlife become entangled. Advances in pop-up gear technology, resulting from Commission-supported Experimental Fishing Permits, now provide a viable pathway to substantially reduce this risk by eliminating persistent vertical lines except during gear retrieval.

The Southern fishing zone (all California waters south of Point Arena) is a high entanglement risk area for whales and sea turtles during the full duration of the coonstripe shrimp fishing season (May-October), as demonstrated by recent entanglements. Although immediate measures are needed to prevent entanglements, a structured three-year transition period to pop-up gear would provide fishermen, regulators, law enforcement, and technology providers sufficient time to adapt operations, address implementation challenges, and ensure a successful deployment of this proven whale-safe technology.

In addition, California's experience managing whale entanglement risk has demonstrated the importance of having responsive management tools that can be implemented quickly when conditions change. Whale distribution and aggregation patterns vary annually and seasonally, and entanglement events can occur unexpectedly. Granting the Director authority, in consultation with the Commission's Executive Director, to temporarily close specific fishing zones to vertical-line gear would provide a targeted and efficient mechanism for reducing risk when circumstances warrant immediate action. Such authority would allow management actions to be tailored to specific areas and time periods while minimizing unnecessary disruption to fishing operations elsewhere.

We further recommend that the Commission establish measures to prevent increases in the coonstripe shrimp fishery's number of vertical lines in the water column. While the transition to pop-up gear in the Southern fishing zone would substantially reduce this risk over time, immediate reductions can also be achieved by limiting the total number of buoyed endlines deployed by the fishery. The Commission should discourage increases in vertical-line fishing effort and support other gear configurations that reduce the number of buoyed lines per trap. The Commission should reduce the total number of vertical lines present in fishing areas while maintaining fishing opportunity and operational flexibility. During Marine Resources Committee discussions on the

Phase 1 rulemaking process, the Commission expressed interest in pursuing gear endorsement conditions or establishing a limited entry permit as a tool to control vertical line effort increases in this fishery. We ask that the Commission and Department implement these participation control tools as a means of minimizing entanglement risk as part of the upcoming rulemaking package.

We also share the concerns raised by a fisher during previous regulatory discussions about risk of entanglements in the groundline connecting traps on the seafloor. We ask that the Department and Commission establish conditions on groundline that minimize the risk of groundline entanglements.

We recognize that any transition to new fishing methods can benefit from informed stakeholder engagement, fishery-dependent information, and practical implementation considerations. Accordingly, we encourage the Commission and Department to work closely with fishermen, conservation organizations, tribal representatives, gear manufacturers, and scientists throughout the rulemaking process. We also encourage the state to expand opportunities for pilot programs, financial assistance, and technical support that can facilitate adoption of pop-up gear technologies. Specifically, a buoy registration database would help the Department better understand and track entanglements that occur in coonstripe shrimp fishing gear but are sighted in locations outside of the designated California fishing zones.

California has long demonstrated that sustainable fisheries management and marine wildlife conservation can be advanced together. Initiating this rulemaking process would represent a thoughtful and proactive step toward reducing whale entanglement risk while supporting the long-term viability of the coonstripe shrimp fishery.

We respectfully request that the Marine Resources Committee recommend that the Commission direct staff, in coordination with the Department, begin developing a rulemaking package incorporating the measures described above.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with the Marine Resources Committee, Commission, and Department on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Geoff Shester, PhD  
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Oceana

Dan Silver  
Executive Director  
Endangered Habitats League



Francine Kershaw, PhD  
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