

2026-2027 Risk Assessment Available Data for Risk Assessment Mitigation Program

Last updated: October 23, 2026

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Management Actions

Commercial Fishery:

- Season Delay: Fishing Zones 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Recreational Fishery:

- Crab Trap Prohibition: Fishing Zones 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- Fleet Advisory: All Fishing Zones

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 October 27, 2026.

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I. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial Dungeness crab fishery, the Marine Region's preliminary recommendation is for the Director to delay the commercial fishery in Fishing Zones 1 -5 until at least January 1, 2027.

For the recreational Dungeness crab fishery, the Marine Region recommends the prohibition of recreational crab traps in Fishing Zones 1 -5, and the issuance of a Fleet Advisory for Fishing Zones 1 -5 until at least January 1, 2027.

A summary is provided here supporting these recommendations. For additional information please review the entire Available Data document.

Entanglements: These recommendations are based on the exceedance of confirmed humpback whale entanglements (the current Entanglement Evaluation score is 3.25, see Table 1 below) for the commercial Dungeness crab fishery. Following a total of three or more confirmed entanglements of humpback whales in California Commercial Dungeness Crab Gear during a calendar year, the Director shall not open the commercial season until January 1 or later of the next calendar year pursuant to 132.8(c)(1)(B)(1)(b). In addition, pursuant to 29.80(c)(4) the Director shall prohibit the deployment and use of recreational crab traps consistent with entanglement triggers in RAMP until January 1, 2027, or later. Under a trap prohibition, hoop nets will still be allowed, but anglers should use increased precaution when setting gear and adhere to the mandatory two-hour service interval to avoid entanglements in vertical lines.

Table 1. Actionable Species Entanglements beginning in 2026, pursuant to RAMP regulations.

Entanglement ID	Reporting Date	Species	Reporting Location	Fishery	Score
20260805Mn	08/05/26	Humpback whale	Santa Cruz Island	Commercial Dungeness crab	1.00
20260627Mn	06/27/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Unknown	0.25
20260525Mn	05/25/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Commercial Dungeness crab	1.00
20260524Mn	05/24/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Recreational Dungeness crab	NA
20260503Mn	05/03/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Recreational Dungeness crab	NA
20260426Mn	04/26/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Unknown	0.25
20260410Mn	04/10/26	Humpback whale	San Diego	Unknown	0.25
20260228Mn	02/28/26	Humpback whale	Monterey	Unknown	0.25
20260208Mn	02/08/26	Humpback whale	Santa Barbara	Unknown	0.25

Note: There have been a number of new entanglements reported since August 2026 which are currently pending review by NMFS and as a result the Entanglement

Evaluation Score may increase pending final determinations. Several of the entanglements involve gear consistent with the commercial Dungeness crab fishery but no Entanglement Evaluation Scores will be assigned under RAMP until that process is complete.

Marine Life Concentrations: The recommendations above are further supported by historical migration patterns and recent observations of large groups of humpback whales in Fishing Zones 2, 3 and 4, which exceeded Marine Life Concentration (MLC) triggers (Table 2). Therefore, the recommended Management Actions will reduce co-occurrence of vertical lines and humpback whales across all Fishing Zones.

Table 2. Marine Life Concentration (MLC) surveys where triggers were exceeded.

Fishing Zone	Data Source	MLC Data	Survey Date
2	CDFW Aerial Survey	34 humpback whales	10/15/2026
3	CDFW Aerial Survey	38 humpback whales	10/16/2026
4	Whale Watch Data	30 humpback whales	10/16/2026

Additionally, the marine heatwave off the US West Coast has generally expanded and intensified in the past few weeks. The current heatwave forecast suggests a high likelihood that marine heatwaves will progressively move from south to north as El Niño driven warming develops over the next several months. Greater impacts may accrue from the prolonged duration of warmer than normal temperatures in the coastal region, which may lead to habitat compression of prey for humpback whales further elevating entanglement risk in nearshore areas.

It is anticipated that the delay and trap prohibition for commercial and recreational fishery would be in place until at least the next Risk Assessment, which is expected to occur in mid-to-late December. That assessment will inform the opener or any additional delays and/or trap prohibitions beyond January 1, 2027.

II. Alternative Management Actions for the Commercial Fishery

Alternatives Considered

- Gear Reduction – as described above, pursuant to RAMP regulations, this cannot be considered at this time.
- Depth Restriction – as described above, pursuant to RAMP regulations, this cannot be considered at this time.
- Alternative Gear- can only be authorized after April 1st.

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 current Entanglement Evaluation is 3.25 for humpback whales for the 2026 calendar year. Table 1 outlines the confirmed entanglements under RAMP beginning with the 2026 calendar year. See "[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.

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 October 23, 2026, there have been zero Confirmed Entanglements of blue whales or leatherback sea turtles during the 2026 calendar year.

II. Marine Life Concentrations: § 132.8(c)(2)

Data provided by: California Dept of Fish and Wildlife, Scott Benson (Upwell), Monterey Bay Whale Watch (processed by Karin Forney, Upwell)

For the period of November 1 until the Fishing Season opens statewide a RAMP Marine Life Concentration trigger has been met when:

- The number of humpback whales is greater than or equal to 20, 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
- A Pacific leatherback sea turtle is seen in any Fishing Zone

Table 31. 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	CDFW Aerial Survey	No
Zone 2	CDFW Aerial Survey	Yes
Zone 3	CDFW Aerial Survey	Yes
Zone 4	CDFW Aerial Survey/MB Whale Watch	Yes
Zone 5	CDFW Aerial Survey	No

A. CDFW Surveys (Fishing Zones 1 – 5)

On October 15, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathom contour line at an altitude of 1000ft covering Fishing Zones 1 and 2 with partial coverage of Fishing Zone 3 (Figure 1). Conditions were favorable; skies were clear and seas were primarily Beaufort state 2. In Fishing Zone 3, 10 humpback whales were observed. In Fishing Zone 2, 34 humpback whales and one unidentified whale were observed. In Fishing Zone 1, three humpback whales and one unidentified whale were observed.

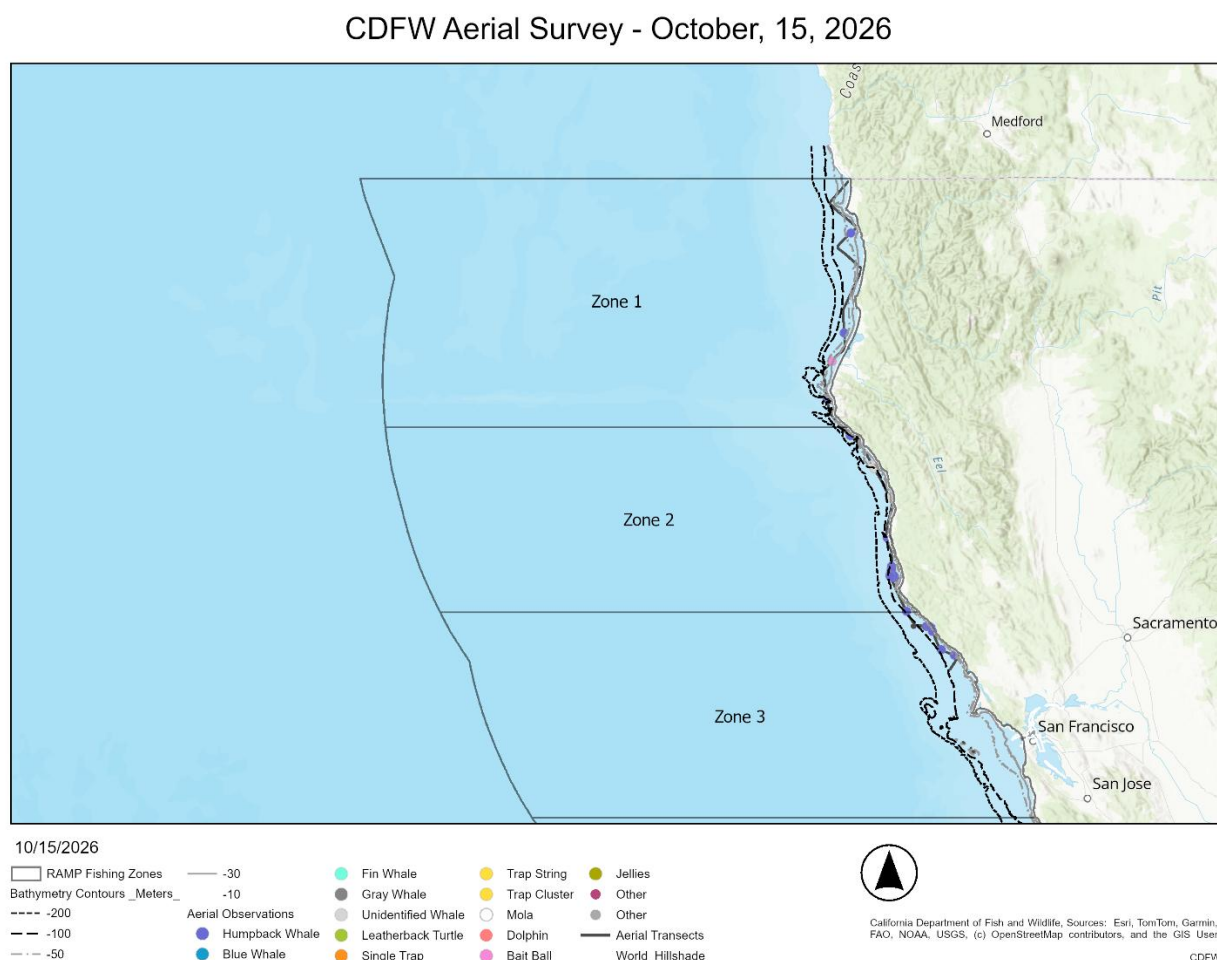


Figure 1. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted on October 15, 2026.

On October 16, 2026, CDFW conducted an aerial survey from the coast to the 100-fathom contour line at an altitude of 1000ft covering Fishing Zone 4 with partial coverage of Fishing Zones 3 and 5 (Figure 2). Conditions were favorable; skies were clear and seas were primarily Beaufort state 2. In Fishing Zone 3, 38 humpback whales and 13 unidentified whales were observed. In Fishing Zone 4, two humpback whales and one unidentified whale were observed. In Fishing Zone 5, one unidentified whale was observed.

CDFW Aerial Survey - October, 16, 2026

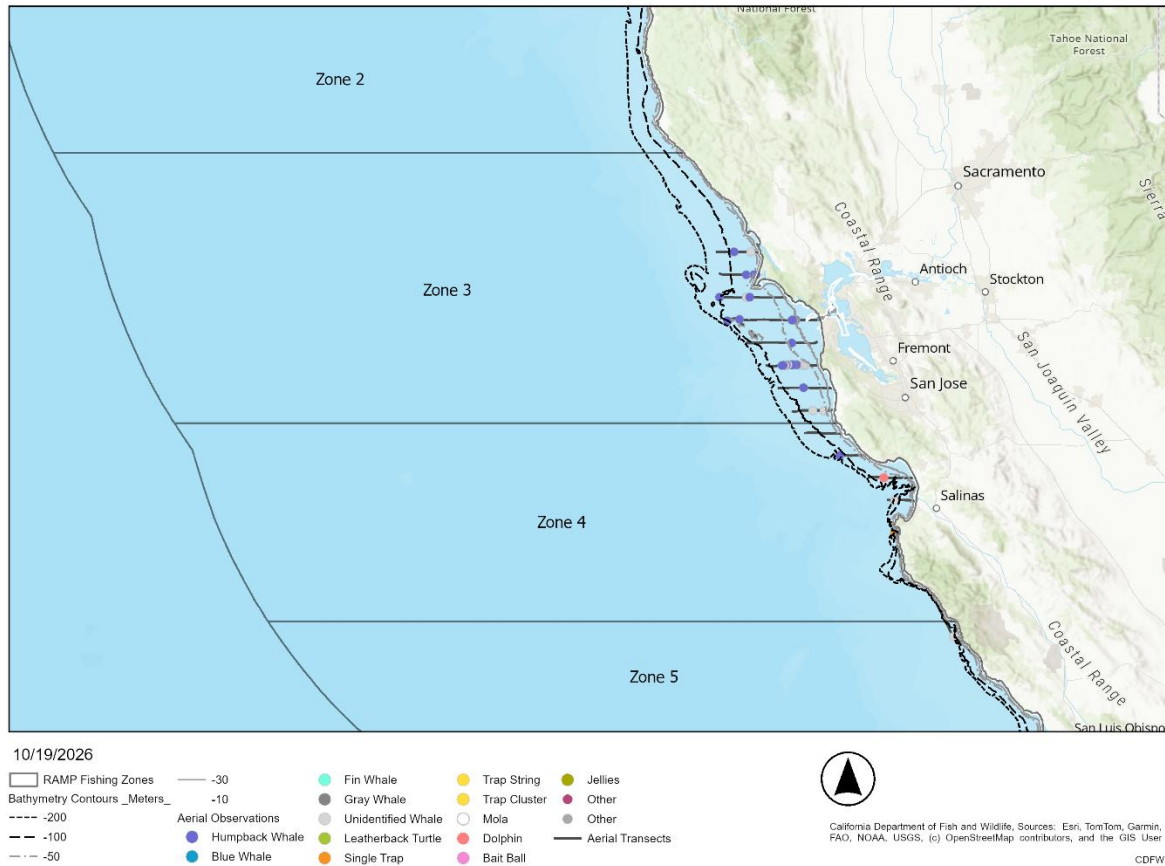


Figure 2. Map of CDFW aerial survey conducted on October 16, 2026.

Table 4. Counts of Actionable Species seen by CDFW aerial survey conducted on October 15 and 16, 2026.

Survey Date	Fishing Zone	Humpback whales	Unidentified whales
10/15/26	Zone 1	3	1
10/15/26	Zone 2	34	5
10/15/26	Zone 3	10	0
10/16/26	Zone 3	38	13
10/16/26	Zone 4	2	1
10/16/26	Zone 5	0	1

B. Monterey Bay Whale Watch Surveys (Fishing Zone 4)

Monterey Bay Whale Watch conducted whale-watching trips in southern Monterey Bay on all seven days during the week of October 11-17, 2026. The 7-day average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip during October 11-17, 2026, was 15.3, with a peak of 30 humpback whales observed during a morning trip on October 16 (Figure 3). A few blue whales were observed throughout August (1-4

whales documented on 11 of 31 days), but none have been observed since August 25, 2026.

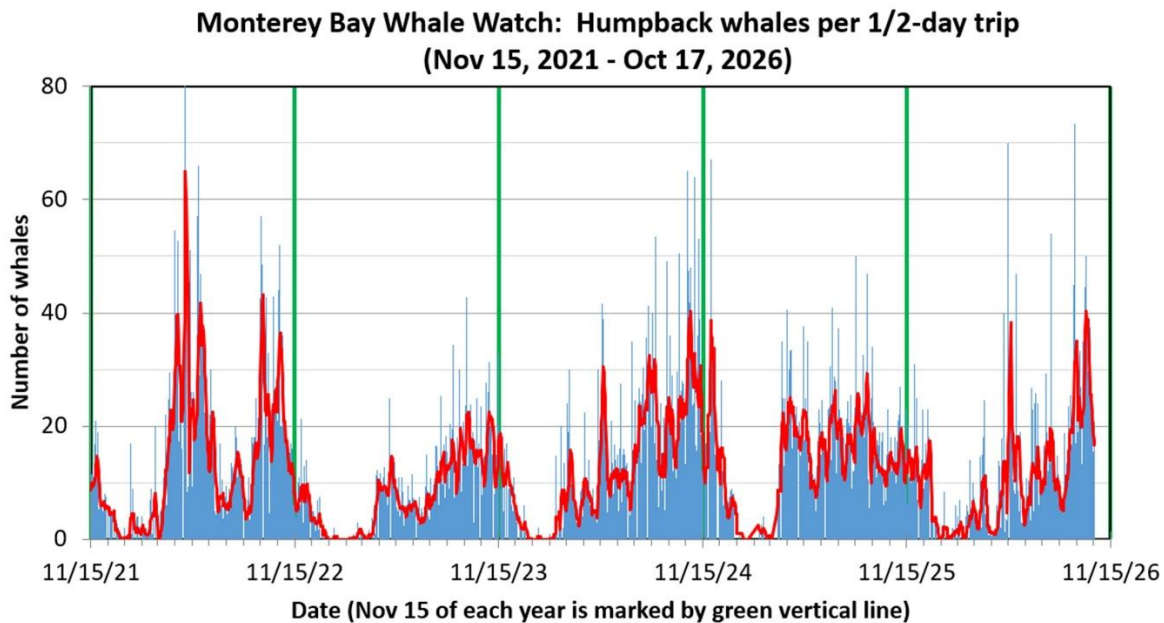


Figure 3. Standardized number of humpback whale sightings for Monterey Bay Whale Watch from November 15, 2021 – October 17, 2026. The y-axis is the number of whales per half-day trip; the thin blue bars are the average daily whale numbers, and the red line is a 7-day running average to make the patterns 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.

C. Upwell Surveys (Fishing Zones 3-5)

One leatherback turtle was seen in Monterey Bay on July 19, 2026, otherwise, no other leatherback turtle sightings or favorable habitat (jellyfish, aggregations of large ocean sunfish) were reported or seen during aerial surveys between Pt. Lobos and Pt. Arena in September. In collaboration with The Nature Conservancy – Solomon Islands, several nesting female leatherbacks have been tagged with satellite-linked transmitters. Some are moving towards the eastern North Pacific and their progress will be monitored for entry into the California Current.

Two Olive Ridley sea turtle sightings were reported in Monterey Bay during August 2026. One hard-shell sea turtle that was likely an Olive Ridley was also observed about 10 miles west of Ragged Point (Monterey/San Luis Obispo County boundary) during an aerial survey conducted by Upwell on October 12. Olive Ridley's are a tropical sea turtle species but anomalously warm ocean temperatures, attributable to the ongoing marine heatwaves and a significant El Niño event, are creating conditions that are more favorable for tropical sea turtle species.

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. 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 5. 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 October, 21, 2026.

Fishing Zone	Number of humpback whales sighted	Number of blue whales sighted
Zone 3	60	0
Zone 4	0	0
N/A - Santa Barbara Channel	15	0

B. Monterey Bay Whale Watch (Fishing Zone 4)

The semi-monthly average number of humpback whales-per-half-day-trip in southern Monterey Bay is slightly above the historical average for this time of year (Figure 4).

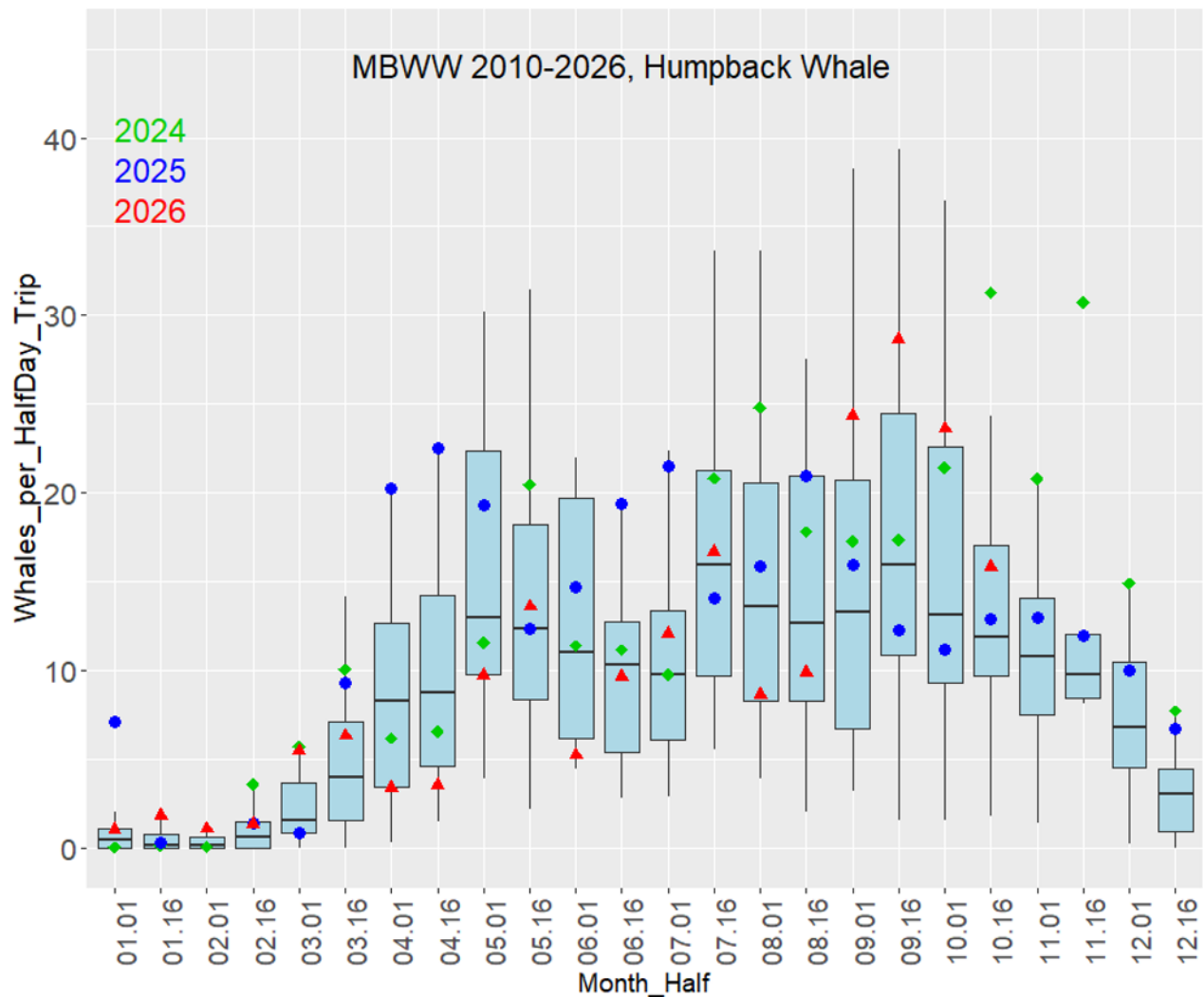


Figure 4. Historical Monterey Bay Whale Watch data for 2010-2026, summarizing the average and variation in the number of humpback whales per half-day trip on a semi-monthly basis (1st- 15th, 16th-end of month). This boxplot follows standard statistical practice in that the black horizontal line is the 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.

C. Whale Watch 2.0 (All Fishing Zones)

Blue whale habitat predictions for October 17, 2026, show high habitat suitability in Fishing Zones 3 and 5, with some suitable habitat in Fishing Zones 1, 2, and 4. Current habitat suitability can be accessed at [NOAA Coastwatch Habitat Suitability Map](#).

II. Fishing Season dynamics: § 132.8(d)(6)

A. Domoic Acid and Quality Testing

Data provided by: California Department of Public Health, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Samples have been collected from Monterey (Fishing Zone 4), Half Moon Bay (Fishing Zone 3), and Crescent City (Fishing Zone 1) and have been submitted to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). [Results through October 16, 2026](#), are posted on the CDPH domoic acid website with the latter location results expected to be posted around October 23.
- Other sample locations are currently being coordinated and results will be posted on [CDPH's domoic acid page](#) under the "Analytical Data – Crabs" section as they are available.
- Quality testing logistics are still being finalized but may be impacted by domoic acid results. Crab quality criteria only affect Fishing Zones 1 and 2.

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

A. MBARI Krill Model

Modeled zooplankton conditions for August 2026, indicate slightly above average expected concentrations between Point Arena and Point Sur (Fishing Zone 3). Current data can be accessed from the [MBARI krill hot spot website](#).

IV. Ocean conditions: § 132.8(d)(8)

A. El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic

As of October 8, 2026, El Niño continues to strengthen, with a strong to very strong El Niño likely through January-March 2027 (remaining greater than an 83% chance). Please visit the [NOAA ENSO Diagnostic webpage](#) for more information.

B. Large Marine Heatwave Tracker

As of September 30, 2026, the marine heatwave off the US West Coast has generally expanded and intensified in the past few weeks. This warming is not due directly to El Niño, but rather other atmospheric and oceanic drivers.

The current heatwave forecast suggests a high likelihood that marine heatwaves will progressively move from south to north as El Niño driven warming develops over the next several months. Greater impacts may accrue from the prolonged duration of warmer than normal temperatures in the coastal region. Please visit the [NOAA Marine Heatwave Tracker webpage](#) for more information.

C. Habitat Compression Index

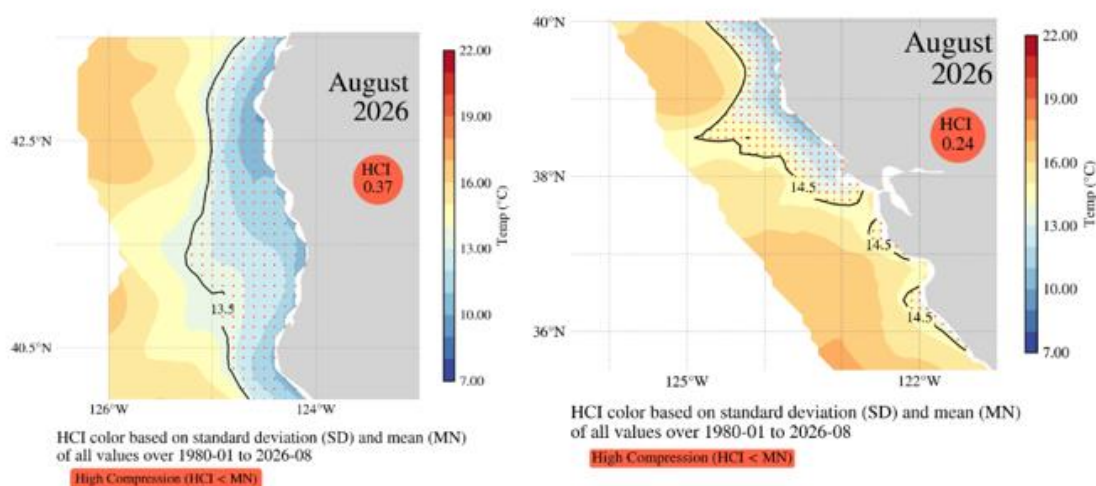


Figure 5. Spatial structure of the Habitat Compression Index (HCI) for Region 2 (40 to 43.5° N: left side) and Region 3 (35 to 40° N: right side).

As of August 2026, Region 2, which includes the north coast of California, shows high habitat compression. Region 3, which includes the central coast of California, shows high habitat compression (Figure 5). Please visit the [NOAA Habitat Compression Index webpage](#) for more information.