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

Date: October 30, 2026

An initial assessment and a preliminary recommendation were developed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region 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 October 23, 2026, and discussed during the Working Group meeting which was held on October 27, 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 web page.

I. 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

II. Management Recommendation Summary Rationale

For the commercial Dungeness crab fishery, the Marine Region's 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
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.

Additionally, there were two entanglements involving recreational crab trap gear in Monterey Bay on May 3 and May 24, 2026 but are not evaluated under RAMP.

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 the commercial and recreational fishery will 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.

III. 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.