Committee Staff Summary for November 12, 2026 MRC

4. Commercial Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Management

Today's Item **Information ☒** **Action ☐**

Receive and discuss a Department update on stakeholder discussions regarding development of management measure options, building on regulations adopted in 2025 and 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 2024; MRC
• Commission approved emergency regulations to amend Section 180.15; referred topic to MRC	February 2025
• Department update and MRC discussion	March 2025; MRC
• MRC received Department-recommended regulation changes; MRC developed recommendation	July 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
• Received and discussed Department overview of a range of potential additional management measures, building on regulations adopted in 2025-2026, to further reduce whale entanglement risk; MRC developed recommendation	July 16, 2026; MRC
• Commission approved MRC recommendation for Department to further develop three key management measures, conduct stakeholder outreach, and return to MRC with an update and for recommendation	August 12-13, 2026
• **Today, receive and discuss a Department update on stakeholder discussions and progress in developing management measure options**	**November 12, 2026; MRC**
• Receive and discuss Department updates and recommended management measures, and potential MRC recommendation	March 18, 2027; MRC

Background

The commercial coonstripe shrimp (*Pandalus danae)* fishery is a small, open-access trap fishery regulated under Section 180.15 that uses longline trap gear consisting of strings of traps connected by a groundline. In recent years, participation in the fishery has increased, in

part because of closures and restrictions in other fisheries. This expansion has raised concerns about whale entanglement risk during peak migration periods because more trap gear and vertical lines are present in the water. Following whale entanglements associated with the fishery, the Commission adopted emergency regulations in February 2025 and subsequently readopted them twice to maintain the provisions for the maximum year-long time frame allowed under law while longer-term measures could be contemplated.

Recognizing that additional long-term management measures would be needed beyond the emergency regulations, the Department, MRC, stakeholders, and fishermen began evaluating management options in March 2025. As discussions progressed, the Department and MRC determined that maintaining the conservation protections established through the emergency regulations through a regular rulemaking was a priority, and that additional time was necessary to develop a comprehensive long-term management strategy.

In July 2025, the Department proposed a phased approach, first incorporating and refining the emergency measures through a regular rulemaking while also adding a new authorization for voluntary use of pop-up gear, and then continuing evaluation of additional entanglement-reduction measures. MRC supported this phased approach, and the Commission approved the strategy in August 2025. The first rulemaking was initiated in December 2025 and adopted in February 2026, establishing regulations that incorporated the emergency measures, with modifications, and authorized voluntary use of pop-up gear.

Following completion of the regular rulemaking, the Department and MRC turned their focus on the next effort to evaluate longer-term fishery management options to further reduce whale entanglement risk, for review beginning at the July 2026 MRC meeting.

Previous MRC Meeting

In July 2026, the Department outlined a range of potential management measures to further reduce whale entanglement risk that were discussed with stakeholders; ultimately, its recommendation focused on developing regulations for three core management measures: (1) a gear endorsement linked to the control date; (2) a transition to pop-up gear, particularly in the southern fishery; and (3) Department director authority for in-season management actions.

The Department also recommended conducting additional stakeholder and fleet outreach through the summer and fall of 2026 and returning to MRC with final recommendations.

Discussion reflected differing perspectives on the range of management options considered, including gear modifications, measures to reduce co-occurrence with whales, in-season response tools, and improved entanglement identification. Fishermen emphasized operational challenges associated with pop-up gear in the northern fishery, while environmental organizations supported mandatory pop-up gear in the southern fishery and advocated for additional risk-reduction measures in both management areas.

MRC supported the Department’s recommended focus on the three core management measures and proposed outreach process, and forwarded that recommendation to the Commission. The Commission adopted the MRC recommendation in August 2026.

Update

Following the July 2026 MRC meeting, the Department continued outreach with the commercial coonstripe shrimp fleet and other interested stakeholders, including a dedicated stakeholder meeting in September 2026. Discussion focused on the three management measures identified for development, as well as potential for limited entry permits, buoy marking requirements, and the use of sinking groundlines.

Today, the Department will present a summary of outreach and stakeholder feedback received since the July MRC meeting and outline next steps (Exhibit 1). The Department anticipates bringing a final recommendation to MRC for consideration in March 2027.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. Department presentation

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Management

November 12, 2026

Presented to:

Marine Resources Committee

Presented by:

Brian Demars-Owens
Northern Invertebrate Project Supervisor

Marine Region

Post July MRC Meeting

Meeting with fleet and other interested parties (Sept. 16)

- Gear Endorsement & Limited Entry Permit
- Transition to Pop-up Gear
- Director Authority
- Buoy Marking
- Sinking Groundlines



Photo: T. Wakefield

Future Participation

Current Fishery

- Open access
- Fishery concern is bycatch of marine mammals via vertical lines, not target stock

Future Fishery

- Maintain opportunity for new entrants?

Gear Endorsement

- Limit the number of vertical lines used in the fishery
- Nontransferable
- Qualification criteria to determine eligibility

Criteria	Vessel Count (statewide)
At least one landing (2015-2025*)	26
1000 lbs total	20
1000 lbs total + 1 landing in last 5 years	16

* Control date: Feb 13, 2025

Discussion: Gear Endorsement

Areas of agreement

- Prevent expansion in total vertical lines to avoid added entanglement risk
- Some form of qualification for continued use of vertical lines


Photo: CDFW

Discussion: Gear Endorsement (cont.)

Qualification Criteria

- Landing history: last 5 years
- Minimum poundage threshold: TBD

Fishery-wide cap on vertical lines

Discussion: Limited Entry

- Focused on northern fishery
- Mixed opinions
- Prevent new entrants and fishery expansion
- Entanglement risk reduction benefits unclear
- Use of spatially explicit management for vertical lines

Mandatory Transition to Pop-Up Gear?

Location

- Southern Fishery
- Northern Fishery

Timeline

- 1 year
- 5 years
- 10 years
- Other?



Photo: CDFW

Discussion: Pop-Up Gear Transition

Southern Management Area

- Broad support for mandatory pop-up gear by 2030*; some support for transitioning ASAP
- Interest in phased options: 50% vertical line reduction by 2029 or full pop-up by 2030
- Shared support for reducing entanglement risk and preventing vertical line growth

*assumes a 2028 adoption

Discussion: Pop-Up Gear Transition (cont.)

Northern Management Area

- Opposed mandatory transition (at this time)
- In lieu of mandatory transition:
  - Include Director authority as management tool to address inseason entanglement risk
  - Continue monitoring entanglement risk in this area to inform whether mandatory use of pop-up fishing gear should be required

Director Authority

Conditions

- Fishery must be open/action taken during a single season
- Only entanglements in CA waters

Potential Management Actions

- Fleet Advisory
- Gear Reductions
- Pop-up Gear Only
- Fishery Closure

Discussion: Director Authority

- Support for Director authority for rapid response to inseason entanglement events
  - Used in leu of a statewide prohibition on vertical lines
- Importance of implement management actions in area where entanglement occurred
- Some expressed desire to only have director authority apply to vertical lines only (no pop-up)

Discussion: Buoy Marking and Groundlines

Buoy Marking

- Clarification requested on whether two vessel IDs can appear on one buoy

Groundlines

- Mixed opinions on floating vs neutrally buoyant groundlines
- Additional discussion needed on purpose, feasibility, and enforcement practicality

Discussion: Other topics

Line Marking

- Some interest in line-marking, buoy tags, or other methods to better track entanglements

Data Requests

- Request for spatial data on fishery footprint

Future Discussion and Guidance

- Timeline for mandatory transition to pop-up fishing gear in Southern Management Area
- Gear Endorsement Criteria
- Do we provide a pathway for new entrants?
  - If so, what does that pathway look like?
- Groundlines

Next Steps

- Further discussions to refine recommendations
- Targeting March 2027 meeting for final MRC recommendation

Thank You



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