

Staff Summary for April 15-16, 2026

7C. Department Marine Region**Today's Item****Information** **Action**

Receive updates on items of note since the previous Commission meeting. For today's meeting:

- I. *Recreational Pacific halibut*: Update on annual regulations and automatic conformance to federal regulations for Pacific halibut. (Pursuant to Section 1.95)
- II. *Recreational Dungeness crab*: Public discussion of action taken by the Department director in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery to prohibit the use of crab traps in Fishing Zone 4 and 5 (Pigeon Point, 37°11' N Latitude to Point Conception, 34°27' N Latitude) effective at 6:00 p.m. on March 27, 2026. (Pursuant to Section 29.80)

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)**Background**I. ***Recreational Pacific Halibut***

The Department's Marine Region is expected to provide verbal updates, including automatic conformance of annual recreational Pacific halibut regulations to federal regulations. A Department Marine Region news release includes information related to the recreational Pacific halibut season timing and quota; the season opened on April 1, 2026 (Exhibit 1).

II. ***Recreational Dungeness crab***

This item is for public discussion of actions taken by the director of the Department in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery to protect migrating whales. Subsection 29.80(c), which specifies rules for the use of crab traps, authorizes the director of the Department, after consulting with the Commission president or designee, to take action to prohibit the deployment and use of recreational crab traps in order to protect humpback whales, blue whales and/or Pacific leatherback sea turtles when concentrations of these species meet specific numerical triggers. When the director implements a management action pursuant to subsection 29.80(c), they must notify the Commission and request that the Commission schedule a public discussion of the management action at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

In March 2026, under authority in subsection 29.80(c), the Department director took action to implement a recreational crab trap restriction in RAMP Fishing Zones 4 and 5, from Pigeon Point to Point Conception, effective at 6:00 p.m. March 27. Use of alternative gear (including hoop nets and crab snares) was still allowed. The management actions were announced in a Department Marine Region news release (Exhibit 2), which also reported management actions taken in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery, including use of approved alternative gear methods and implementing best practices as described in the [Best Practices Guide](#).

Staff Summary for April 15-16, 2026

On April 3, 2026, the director conducted the next risk assessment , and is continuing the recreational fishery crab trap prohibition in Fishing Zones 4 and 5, as well as a fleet advisory for all fishing zones and continuing commercial actions. The Department's [Whale Safe Fisheries](#) webpage provides updates, including upcoming risk assessment dates.

Today is the opportunity for the public to discuss the recent actions taken by the director in the recreational Dungeness crab fishery.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. Department news release: ["Recreational Pacific Halibut Season to Open April 1,"](#) dated March 27, 2026
2. Department news release: ["Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishing Opportunities Continue with Alternative 'Pop-Up' Gear to Protect Whales from Entanglement,"](#) dated March 13, 2026

Motion (N/A)



CDFW NEWS

March 27, 2026

Recreational Pacific Halibut Season to Open April 1



The 2026 recreational Pacific halibut fishery will open Wednesday, April 1 and remain open until the season ends Nov. 15 north of Point Arena (38°57.5 N. Latitude) and Dec. 31 south of Point Arena, or until the quota is reached, whichever occurs first. The 2026 Pacific halibut quota for the California sport fishery is 40,040 pounds — approximately the same amount as last year.

The Pacific halibut opening date for waters off California this year aligns with the April 1 opening date for all-depth recreational boat-based fishing for many groundfish species

statewide, including rockfish, lingcod, cabezon and greenlings. Anglers are always advised to check for updated information when planning a Pacific halibut fishing trip.

Season dates, bag/possession limits and gear restrictions can be found on CDFW's [Pacific halibut web page](#).

Groundfish fishing regulations can be found on CDFW's [Summary of Recreational Groundfish Fishing Regulations](#) page.

Public notification of any in-season change to regulations is made through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific halibut hotline at (800) 662-9825 or CDFW's Groundfish and Pacific halibut Regulations Hotline at (831) 649-2801.

Annual state regulations for Pacific halibut automatically conform to federal regulations set by NMFS using the process described in Section 1.95(b)(2), Title 14, California Code of Regulations. Federal regulations for Pacific halibut were published in the Federal Register (91 FR 14464) on March 25, 2026, and became effective March 12.

Media Contacts:

[Melanie Parker](#), CDFW Marine Region, (831) 601-5928

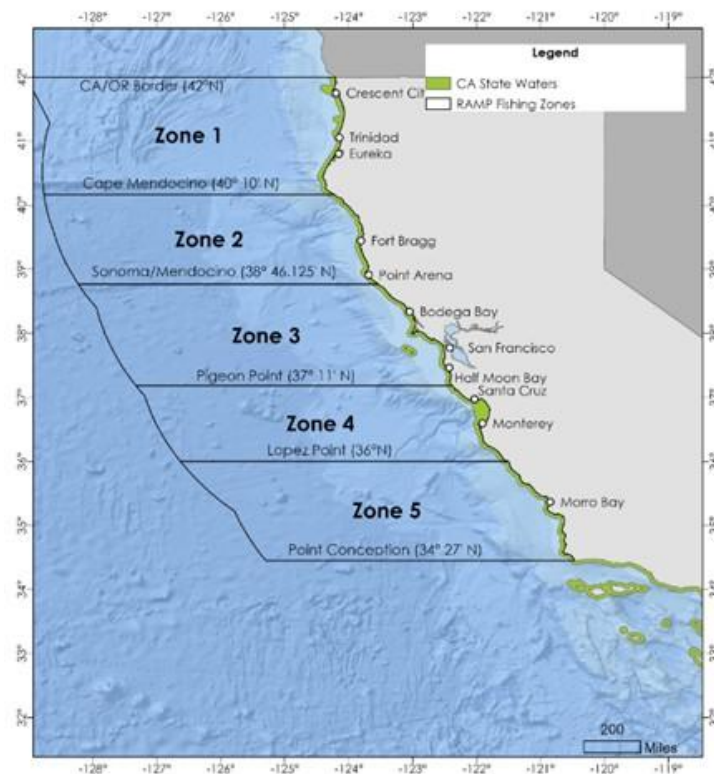
[Steve Gonzalez](#), CDFW Communications, (916) 804-1714



CDFW NEWS

March 13, 2026

Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishing Opportunities Continue with Alternative 'Pop-Up' Gear to Protect Whales from Entanglement



Recreational Crab Trap Restriction Goes Into Effect in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 (Pigeon Point, 37°11' N Latitude to Point Conception, 34°27' N Latitude)

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director Meghan Hertel has assessed entanglement risk under the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP) and [announced changes to both commercial and recreational Dungeness crab fisheries \(PDF\)](#) in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 (Pigeon Point, 37°11' N Latitude to Point Conception, 34°27' N Latitude).

These changes include authorizing the use of alternative gear, or pop-up fishing gear, for the first time in the commercial Dungeness crab fishery. Pop-up fishing gear uses buoys and lines attached to cages, just like traditional crab traps, however the buoys and lines of pop-up gear remain coiled on the seafloor. When a commercial fisherman is ready to retrieve their gear, a remote signal triggers the release of the buoy which carries the line to the surface and allows commercial crabbers to locate the trap for immediate removal.

“The use of pop-up fishing gear is an exciting new development in California fisheries management,” said CDFW Director Hertel. “For the first time, pop-up fishing gear will allow one of California’s most iconic fisheries to continue. Dungeness crab will still be brought to market while whales and sea turtles are protected from entanglement in those fishing zones.”

Use of this pop-up fishing gear has been tested extensively over several years to ensure gear can be recovered successfully and now provides additional fishing opportunity after the season is closed to traditional crab trap gear. This action is intended to minimize entanglement risk while continuing fishing opportunities as humpback whales return to forage off the California coast.

The commercial fishery will close on March 27, 2026, at 6 p.m. in Fishing Zones 4 and 5, at which time the commercial take and possession of Dungeness crab from those waters is prohibited unless using alternative gear as authorized by the director of CDFW

The use of approved Alternative Gear in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 will be allowed beginning April 3, 2026, at 7 a.m. There are currently two approved alternative gear types that are authorized for use for all commercial Dungeness crab permit holders. Please visit the [Whale Safe Fisheries page](#) for more information about the specific gear models and configurations that are authorized for use.

The commercial fishery will remain open in Fishing Zones 1, 2, and 3 (California/Oregon border to Pigeon Point) under existing crab trap reductions. Based on historical migration data, CDFW anticipates an increase in whale abundance in the upcoming weeks. Individuals should remain vigilant and be prepared to remove gear quickly, to minimize entanglement risk in these fishing zones.

A recreational crab trap restriction will go into effect on March 27, 2026, at 6p.m., for Fishing Zones 4 and 5. CDFW reminds recreational crabbers that take of Dungeness crab by other methods (including hoop nets and crab snares) is allowed through the close of the season. CDFW also reminds all fishery participants to implement best practices as described in the [Best Practices Guide \(PDF\)](#).

Pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(E) of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commercial Dungeness crab vessels are authorized to retrieve an unlimited number of commercial Dungeness crab traps which are lost, damaged, abandoned or otherwise derelict in Fishing Zones 4 and 5 starting at 6 a.m. on April 3, 2026. CDFW requests that individuals retrieving gear pursuant to Section 132.2(a)(2)(E) report their activities to WhaleSafeFisheries@wildlife.ca.gov. Any vessel operating or transiting in an open Fishing Zone may not possess more than six traps belonging to another vessel, pursuant to Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Section 132.2(a)(2)(A).

CDFW anticipates the next risk assessment will take place in early April 2026. For more information related to the risk assessment process or trap gear retrieval, please visit [CDFW's Whale Safe Fisheries page](#). For more information on the Dungeness crab fishery, please visit wildlife.ca.gov/crab.

Media Contacts:

[Ryan Bartling](#), CDFW Marine Region, (415) 238-2638

[Steve Gonzalez](#), CDFW Communications, (916) 804-1714