



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Marine Region
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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



June 15, 2020

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
1416 9th Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: Department of Fish and Wildlife Support for Project Funding

Dear Chair Crowfoot and Members of the Ocean Protection Council:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has worked closely with Ocean Protection Council (OPC) staff and supports authorization of funding for the following projects:

- Marine Protected Areas (MPA) monitoring and outreach
- Projects to reduce the risk of whale and sea turtle entanglement in fishing gear
- Statewide Kelp Recovery Research Program

The Department is the primary agency responsible for managing California's marine protected areas (MPAs), is an integral partner in the MPA Management Program, and a member of the MPA Statewide Leadership Team. California's MPAs comprise the largest network of MPAs in North America and one of the largest in the world. The communications strategy would help provide clear communication to the public, stakeholders, and decision makers about what to expect during California's first MPA network decadal management review. Set to occur in 2022, the decadal management review will encompass all areas of MPA network management including but not limited to, ecological, socioeconomic, and enforcement data. The proposed communications strategy will help unify messaging, establish expectations, and raise awareness of what this review will entail. The project will also help fill a critical need to meaningfully engage with the public leading up to the formal review.

The tribal marine stewards network pilot program will engage California Tribes in MPA and monitoring and management. Information gained from this pilot project will help identify shared priorities between Tribes and the state and enhance the capacity of California coastal Tribes to inform the adaptive management of California's MPA network.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

Since 2015, the Department has been closely coordinating with OPC and the National Marine Fisheries Service on a multi-faceted effort to reduce marine life entanglement risk, including convening a broad cross-section of stakeholders through the California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group).

The proposed projects address priority informational needs and address data gaps identified by the Department during development of the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program (RAMP) and draft Conservation Plan. Enhancing available data and quality will help the Department and Working Group to assess marine life entanglement risk and determine the appropriate management response during periods of elevated entanglement risk.

The Department also supports authorization of funding by to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to coordinate testing of fishing gear innovations which may reduce the frequency and severity of marine life entanglements. This project will address key questions regarding reliability of multiple gear types and their compatibility with current fishing practices. Expanded testing will provide the Department and fishery participants with information needed to evaluate broad-scale authorization and use of gear innovations within state-managed trap fisheries such as Dungeness crab.

Kelp forests are critically important ecosystems in coastal California. Recent severe declines in kelp have caused the ecosystem to collapse resulting in impacts to recreational and commercial fisheries and non-consumptive uses. The Statewide Kelp and Recovery Research Program (Program) is a partnership among California Sea Grant, OPC, and the Department. This Program is designed to fill essential knowledge gaps in our understanding of kelp ecosystem processes, including improved scientific understanding of the drivers of kelp decline and evaluation of the efficacy of different restoration approaches. Improved understanding of these issues will enable the Department and partners to develop appropriate restoration strategies and a long-term management plan for kelp ecosystems throughout the state.

OPC support has been, and will continue to be, critical to the success of the above projects. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at 805-568-1246 or by email at Craig.Shuman@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Craig Shuman, D. Env.
Marine Regional Manager

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