



January 29, 2018

John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311, Sacramento, CA 95814
Sent via email: COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov

RE: Item 6 – Support Authorization to Disburse Proposition 84 Funds to the Development of California’s Ocean Acidification Action Plan

Dear Secretary Laird and members of the Ocean Protection Council:

California Coastkeeper Alliance (CCKA) and the undersigned organizations strongly support the disbursement of Proposition 84 Funds to California Ocean Science Trust (OST) to assist the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) in the development of California’s Ocean Acidification Action Plan, pursuant to the state’s commitments as a member of the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification (‘OA Alliance’ or ‘Alliance’). Our organizations have been longtime supporters of the strategic investment of OPC resources and state bond funds, like Proposition 84, in projects that seek to address the threat of changing ocean conditions. We are proud of California’s leadership in the OA Alliance and many of our organizations are affiliate members of the Alliance, reflecting our collective commitment to elevating the issue of ocean acidification and supporting government efforts to address it.

Ocean acidification and hypoxia are increasingly present in coastal waters, as global carbon dioxide emissions have rapidly increased over the past centuries. The fundamental changes we are seeing in the chemical composition of seawater threaten the health of coastal ecosystems and the communities and industries that depend on the marine environment. Research suggests that the West Coast of North America will face some of the earliest, most severe changes in ocean chemistry, underscoring the need for OPC to take immediate and effective action to mitigate OAH, where possible, and assist communities in adapting to changing ocean conditions.

We offer brief comments below to ensure that the development of this Action Plan accelerates action to enhance the resiliency of our state's marine ecosystems, communities, and ocean economy to ocean acidification and hypoxia (OAH) and changing ocean conditions, more broadly. With the Governor's Climate Summit in September 2018, we have the opportunity to lead and shape oceans resiliency work, not only in California, but in similarly situated states and nations around the world.

1. California's OA Action Plan should include concrete, tangible activities to address OAH impacts.

Much of our support of the OA Alliance stems from its unique focus on concrete, implementable actions to address changing ocean conditions. The key goals of the Alliance include: reducing the causes of acidification, protecting the environment and coastal communities from its impacts, and building sustained support for tackling this global problem. While advancing scientific understanding is also identified as a key goal, the undersigned organizations stress that OPC and OST, in their development of California's Action Plan, prioritize developing practicable and tangible solutions to mitigate and adapt to ocean acidification impacts.

At the October 2016 OPC meeting, multiple of the undersigned organizations, including CCKA, Heal the Bay, Surfrider, and NRDC, publicly supported the disbursement of Proposition 84 funds to a series of research projects aimed at improving our understanding of ocean acidification in California. We are still strongly supportive of these projects, as well as ongoing research to understand the causes and long-term impacts of acidification by partner organizations and agencies like SCCWRP.

However, parallel to ongoing research to better understand the nature of OAH and changing ocean conditions in the coming years, we must pursue precautionary, no-regrets policy measures to increase the overall health and resiliency of our oceans. As one of the first government members to initiate development of an Action Plan, we ask that California set a strong precedent in the Alliance by advancing specific policy solutions to address acidification, in line with the concrete recommendations developed by the 2016 West Coast OAH Panel and Report, and earlier solutions identified in the 2013 Stanford paper, *Mitigating Local Causes of Ocean Acidification with Existing Laws*. Research regarding ocean health must continue, but California can and should simultaneously pursue and prioritize tangible policy and restoration measures to mitigate human activity, like minimizing pollution inputs to the ocean, that can exacerbate ocean acidification.

2. California's OA Action Plan must not be limited to OAH, but should address broader changing ocean conditions.

The initial vision of the OA Alliance was an international network that would address the threats posed by changing ocean conditions, as well as ocean acidification and hypoxia. We ask that California's OA Action Plan reflect this broader commitment to understanding and addressing other threats to ocean water quality that are exacerbated by human activities and climate change. For example, while research continues to determine the extent to which eutrophication contributes to acidic conditions specifically, nutrient pollution has clearly been identified as a factor in increasing toxic bloom activity. The resulting harmful algal blooms threaten aquatic life, pose a serious public health risk, and impact recreational and commercial fisheries.

Similarly, the Action Plan should address changes in other physical and chemical processes in the marine environment that may result from or contribute to acidification. For example, warming ocean temperatures due to climate change have been shown to make some species more vulnerable to acidification. In some regions, pollution and warming temperatures can have cascading impacts on the marine food web, reducing the resilience of the whole ecosystem to acidification, as has been seen in the kelp forests off California's North Coast.

The OA Action Plan provides an opportunity for California to identify measurable and actionable steps to address changing ocean conditions more broadly, including habitat restoration and water quality protection. By investing

on multiple fronts in policy and science solutions to maintain and improve ocean health, the state will, in turn, increase the resiliency of marine and coastal ecosystems to acidification specifically. A broader scope and focus on changing oceans will also allow for identification and prioritization of actions that can address not only OAH, but also harmful algal blooms, warming, and other climate-driven changes to ocean water quality.

The California OA Action Plan provides a valuable opportunity for the state to catalyze inter-agency action to address the threat of changing ocean conditions and to set a strong precedent of OA Alliance Action Plans that can be put into practice immediately and yield multiple ocean health benefits. The support provided by OST through this disbursement will allow OPC staff to translate the best available science into tangible solutions for the benefit of California's marine ecosystem, as well as the communities and businesses that depend on it. We look forward to working with you on the development of this Plan.

Sincerely,



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California Coastkeeper Alliance



Sarah Sikich, Vice President
Heal the Bay



Jennifer Savage, California Policy Manager
Surfrider Foundation



George Leonard, Chief Scientist
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Miyoko Sakashita, Oceans Director
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