

CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

Staff Recommendation
September 23, 2005

Ocean Protection Council and Sea Grant Partnership for Ocean and Coastal Research

Developed By: Rebecca Pollock

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and possible determination as a high priority the Ocean Protection Council and Sea Grant Partnership for Ocean and Coastal Research project to provide up to \$1,000,000 to Sea Grant to administer an ocean research grant program, and authorization for the Secretary to take actions needed to provide for its planning or implementation.

OCEAN or COASTAL LOCATION: Statewide

AGENCY OR ENTITY RECOMMENDING PROJECT: State Coastal Conservancy, California Resources Agency, and California Sea Grant

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: California Sea Grant College Program and University of Southern California Sea Grant Program Proposal Review Processes

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION:

“The Ocean Protection Council finds pursuant to Sections 35600, *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code that the Ocean Protection Council and Sea Grant Partnership for Ocean and Coastal Research, as herein described, is of high priority for ocean conservation and authorizes the Secretary to take actions necessary for its planning or implementation, including the allocation of up to \$1,000,000 through an agreement with the California Sea Grant College Program and University of Southern California Sea Grant Program (“Sea Grant”) for the purposes of this partnership.”

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (Council) authorize a partnership for ocean and coastal research with Sea Grant. The proposed \$1,000,000 grant to Sea Grant would provide

PARTNERSHIP FOR OCEAN AND COASTAL RESEARCH

initial funding for the partnership, in which Sea Grant would administer the solicitation, review, and grant award process for scientific research proposals submitted for funding in 2006. The list of research projects recommended by Sea Grant for funding would be presented to the Council for the Council's concurrence prior to awarding grants.

One of the Council's primary objectives is to provide high-quality research to support management of ocean and coastal resources. The proposed partnership between the Council and Sea Grant is the first recommended action in the Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy submitted to the Council for consideration at this meeting. The Strategy suggests that the Council establish a firm commitment to fund research activities that support effective ocean management. Research is necessary in order to fill existing gaps in knowledge that hinder effective policy and decision-making, particularly critical as we move towards ecosystem-based management. This partnership would support data collection, synthesis, and dissemination of information that is essential to coastal and ocean resource management.

The California Sea Grant College Program and University of Southern California Sea Grant Program have offered to partner with the Council by coordinating the request for proposals, the peer review process, and post-award grant administration. Sea Grant has an established, highly respected process for evaluating, prioritizing and administering research grants related to coastal and ocean resources. Projects are selected on the basis of a competitive review process and address a wide range of marine-related issues.

California's Sea Grant Programs

Nationally, the Sea Grant College Network consists of 30 university-based programs funded primarily by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and dedicated to the understanding, conservation, and sustainable use of coastal and marine resources. The California Sea Grant College Program is the largest of the 30 Sea Grant programs, and works along the entire state coastline and coastal watersheds. It is administered by the University of California and is based at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. Among their top priority issues are: marine fisheries, water quality and sediment, ecosystem-based management, invasive species, aquaculture, marine protected areas, human health, and habitat restoration. The University of Southern California Sea Grant focuses primarily on the state's southern coastal metropolitan region, with particular emphasis on topics related to the urban ocean. Their priorities include protecting water quality, improving port and marine transportation operations, ensuring shoreline stability and preventing coastal hazards, and promoting the sustainable development of coastal areas.

The two programs review projects and administer grant awards according to the same national standard, and therefore undergo the same review process, which would facilitate the Council's interactions with both programs. Sea Grant's credible review process can provide effective project review and selection services to the Council with minimal overhead (see Exhibit 1). Currently, the Council does not have procedures in place to solicit proposals for scientific research projects, and staff has determined that creating an internal grant review process would be costly and largely redundant of the Sea Grant process.

Existing Relationship and Shared Priorities

The proposed partnership would benefit from an existing relationship between the Resources Agency and Sea Grant. The Resources Agency Sea Grant Advisory Panel (RASGAP) was

PARTNERSHIP FOR OCEAN AND COASTAL RESEARCH

formed through legislation to enable the state to have a role in the review of scientific proposals submitted to Sea Grant. RASGAP reviews project proposals to determine their benefit to the management of the state's ocean and coastal resources. It is chaired by the Assistant Secretary for Ocean and Coastal Policy and consists of representatives from state government, state legislature, state universities, and industry.

Because of shared priorities and the existing relationship between Sea Grant and the Council, coordinating Council research projects with the Sea Grant review process is practical and cost effective. An additional benefit of the proposed partnership will be joint decisions on supporting research that achieves common objectives of the Council and Sea Grant.

Implementation of the Partnership

The Council will consult with Sea Grant regarding any unsolicited research proposals received to determine if such proposals should be directed to Sea Grant. The general parameters of the review process would be as follows:

- (a) The annual release of the Sea Grant Request for Proposals (RFP) in late January will be organized to include the RFP for Council research projects. From submission of preliminary proposals to the decision on final funding for projects, the review process will take approximately six months.
- (b) Proposals directed to the Council will be reviewed by the same committees and complete the same process as Sea Grant proposals. This thorough process begins with the screening of preliminary proposals and involves two review committees (one scientific/technical committee and one focused on state priorities), ad hoc peer reviews, dialogue with proposal authors, written comments accompanying each decision, and a mechanism for handling appeals.
- (c) The Council will have a team of participants in all stages of the review process, including final ranking. Projects submitted to Sea Grant will be reviewed for consistency with research priorities according to the Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy, if adopted.
- (d) Projects selected through this review process will be presented to the Council for final endorsement of grant awards.
- (e) Sea Grant will provide all post-award grant administration, including reporting and financial accounting by charging up to 12% in administrative costs on the grants awarded.

Scientific research addressing Council priorities will close gaps in knowledge that hinder appropriate management and protection efforts. The selection of scientifically sound research projects is critical. Implementing a strong, proven review process will allow the Council to select and fund such projects. This time-intensive process can be most efficiently carried out through the partnership proposed with Sea Grant. If the partnership is successful and if there are funds available in coming years, this partnership could become an annual award to Sea Grant.

PROJECT FINANCING

Funding Sources:

PARTNERSHIP FOR OCEAN AND COASTAL RESEARCH

Ocean Protection Council to California Sea Grant College Program	\$800,000
Ocean Protection Council to U.S.C. Sea Grant Program	\$200,000
Grant Awardees' Funding Match	<u>\$440,000</u>

Total Project Cost **\$1,440,000**

Staff anticipates using \$1,000,000 of the Ocean Protection Council's Tidelands Oil funds, appropriated to the Secretary of Resources in the FY 04/05 for projects authorized pursuant to the Ocean Protection Act. The Resources Agency has entered into an interagency agreement with the Conservancy to administer these funds on behalf of the Council and recommend projects for funding.

The agreement with Sea Grant will place a cap on university overhead for proposed projects. Further, Council research proposals funded through this partnership could entail matching requirements similar to Sea Grant, normally a 50% match, which would expand the return on investment of Council funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA'S OCEAN ACTION STRATEGY: The proposed project is consistent with action item number four in that it supports recommendations relating to research initiatives in the Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy.

CONSISTENCY WITH OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

Mandatory Criteria

1. Furthers the following statutory purposes and policies of the Ocean Protection Act:

- **Improves management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems:** Scientific research adhering to Ocean Protection Council priorities will help close gaps in knowledge that hinder appropriate management decisions and protection efforts.
- **Promotes aesthetic, educational and recreational uses of the coast and ocean:** Support of scientific research not only encourages the use of the coast and ocean environments for educational purposes, it results in advanced knowledge essential for understanding the importance of conserving these ecosystems and resources for future aesthetic, educational, and recreational use.
- **Improve monitoring, data gathering, and advances in scientific understanding of the ocean and coastal environment:** The selection and funding of scientifically sound, high priority research projects concerning the ocean and coast is crucial to pertinent and timely data gathering and to enhancing present understanding.
- **Improves the health of fish and fosters sustainable fisheries in ocean and coastal waters:** Fisheries-targeted scientific research and subsequent dissemination of information will encourage appropriate management and conservation efforts for sustainable fisheries.
- **Helps to coordinate the collection and sharing of scientific data:** The proposed partnership provides a mechanism for appropriate solicitation, review, and selection of research projects that support Council priorities.

PARTNERSHIP FOR OCEAN AND COASTAL RESEARCH

2. **Consistent with the purposes of the funding source:** See Project Financing Section above.
3. **Has demonstrable support from the public:** The project is supported by both the California Sea Grant College and University of Southern California Sea Grant Programs, in addition to marine labs and research institutions across the state, non-governmental organizations, and federal and state government agencies. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 2.
4. **Relates directly to the ocean, coast, associated estuaries, and coastal-draining watersheds:** This partnership will fund research projects that have their focus in various locations across the state, including coastal and nearshore areas and state waters.
5. **Has greater-than-local interest:** Research projects conducted at locations across the state provide knowledge and understanding of the entire state's coastal and marine resources.

Additional Criteria

1. **Helps implement the California Ocean and Coastal Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy and other priorities of local, state or federal advisory groups, or scientific or policy reports, adopted by the Council:** The proposed project implements the first recommendation of the Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy proposed for the Council's adoption today. Through the partnership, appropriate funds are encumbered for research activities that other Council funding sources cannot support. The partnership assists in meeting requirements of the California Ocean Protection Act by allocating funding specifically for scientific research, and providing a credible body to support the Council with functions related to pre- and post-award functions. This commitment to research activities also reflects the Strategy's principle of maximizing investments by seeking matching funds and in-kind services through each project funded.
2. **The project would not occur without Council participation:** The project involves expenditure on behalf of the Council to provide the staffing, infrastructure, and process to solicit, review, and award grants for scientific research funded by the Council.
3. **The project includes a contribution of funds or services by other entities:** The Sea Grant funding process requires matching funds by the grantee. The Council may choose to install similar requirements for research project funding requests by including language in the agreement with Sea Grant and the request for proposals that Sea Grant disseminates.
4. **The project is ready to implement (grantee or contractor will start and finish the project in a timely manner):** Sea Grant has the infrastructure in place to immediately proceed with the partnership should the funding be allocated.