



Item 5a

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ocean Protection Council
FROM: Jacqueline Meyer, Fisheries Policy Analyst
DATE: July 29, 2015
RE: Lessons Learned from OPC's Investments in Fisheries Memo

The need to support commercial and recreational fishing opportunities and healthy marine ecosystems are key ocean issues for California. One of the Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) goals is to promote innovative approaches to fishery management (see OPC's Five-Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017). The OPC is uniquely situated to build a strong portfolio of investments for California fisheries management, but to do so in a strategic manner and in a close partnership with the state fishery managers, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Fish and Game Commission (FGC), and the state legislature. Additionally, the OPC needs to ensure that these investments are also based on sound science thus, building upon and utilizing the relationship with the Ocean Science Trust (OST) is equally important. In order to ensure OPC's investments in fisheries projects are strong, it is worthwhile to look at the past ten years of OPC-funded projects and use information learned from those projects to develop strategies moving forward for future funding cycles. Therefore, the OPC has reviewed the past decade's worth of projects and will release a report, *Lessons Learned from OPC's Investments in Fisheries*. The report will be completed by the OPC in Fall 2015 as a result of the OPC's interest in gaining a better understanding of fisheries-related projects that have been funded.

This memo gives a brief background and overview of the information that will be in the final report. The report will identify successes, areas for improvement, and opportunities for the OPC to support innovative fisheries projects. For many years, OPC staff have worked in close collaboration with state fishery managers. The past few years in particular has seen a renewed focus on collaborative efforts between staff from OPC, DFW, FGC and the OST to prioritize areas of greatest need in order to advance our work. Moreover, the need for the partners to continue to work closely together with shared priorities and goals is a key lesson learned from the project review process. Therefore, the OPC will continue to engage other agencies, academics and stakeholders. The breadth of projects undertaken over the past decade demonstrate the OPC's ability to bring a wide variety of diverse fisheries stakeholders together in support of sustainable fisheries management and marine ecosystem protection.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The OPC is charged with implementing the California Ocean Protection Act (COPA) and funds projects and programs that target the actions identified in the OPC Strategic Plan (<http://www.opc.ca.gov/strategic-plan/>). OPC priorities are focused around five key areas: science-based decision making, climate change, sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystems, land based impacts to ocean resources, and existing and emerging ocean uses. Therefore, key goals of the OPC

are to promote sustainable fisheries management and to ensure healthy and thriving marine ecosystems and fishing communities. As a result, the OPC-funded projects were aimed at innovative approaches to fisheries management, intended to advance all of California's fisheries toward sustainability.

This project was undertaken to help the OPC and its state partners, the DFW, FGC, and OST to strategically plan for and fund future fisheries-related projects. The report evaluates the progress to-date on completed and ongoing projects and identifies opportunities to improve utilization of projects. The report also identifies areas where completed projects were implemented in a way that meets the strategic vision of the OPC, and provides key recommendations to advance future grant/contract funding cycles. These are mainly recommendations intended to assist the OPC by identifying areas where improvement in project prioritization and selection should occur, and stresses the need for collaboration and strengthening existing partnerships with the DFW, FGC, the OST and other stakeholders.

The OPC funded more than 30 fisheries-related projects over the past decade, resulting in a total expenditure of \$15.7 million dollars. Therefore, the OPC has a vested interest in making sure any monies allocated moving forward are utilized in a necessary and strategic manner. In order to do this, a review of the projects funded over the last ten years is warranted. To complete this work, OPC staff obtained the project files for previously funded projects and reviewed the scope of work, work plans, budgets, final reports and end-user products. Additional information was recorded such as projects delays, problems with implementation and the number of amendments that resulted in additional costs or changes to the timelines and expected deliverables. As a result of this review, the *Lessons Learned from OPC's Investments in Fisheries* report will be completed. The report will provide an overview of all fishery projects and where OPC's investments resulted in significant improvement to the fishery, ecosystem or community. Additionally, the report also identifies key areas that could be improved upon to ensure that future projects are selected, funded and implemented in a manner that ensures the OPC's investment is catalytic and/or transformative.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM OPC'S INVESTMENTS IN FISHERIES REPORT

The Lessons Learned from OPC's Investments in Fisheries report consists of three essential components: (1) a description of the OPC and its role within sustainable fisheries in California, (2) a summary of past and ongoing fisheries-related projects, and (3) descriptions of successful strategies of project implementation and recommendations for future project advancement.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The report notes that while important projects have been funded and successfully completed, improvements to the grant/contract award process and selection criteria can still be made. Additionally, existing partnerships between the OPC, DFW, FGC, OST and NOAA, as well as other state agencies, tribes, commercial/recreational fisheries, academics, non-governmental agencies, and other stakeholders can be further strengthened and improved upon in order to be more strategic in planning, selection and delivery efforts to meet California's fisheries management needs. The report provides these major recommendations:

1. Ensure future projects are selected and funded based upon prioritization of projects aimed at supporting the DFW's and FGC's management of California's ocean fisheries. Revisions to the MLMA Master Plan for Fisheries will be a key component of this.

2. Ensure future projects also consider socioeconomic and community-based aspects to promote healthy and resilient marine ecosystems and fishing communities.
3. Identify opportunities for tiered research and ensure resulting project recommendations are considered and incorporated into future research plans where warranted, especially to avoid unnecessary overlap or replication of similar and previous work.
4. Build on the recent work to improve relationships with a written, practical strategy to strengthen and improve partnerships between the OPC, DFW and OST and other stakeholders regarding collaboration on fisheries related projects.
5. Foster collaborative research programs to increase the understanding of California's fisheries and fishing communities, and to develop science-based decision making tools to allow for better management of California's fisheries. Continue the engagement with the OPC Science Advisory Team.
6. Ensure that robust peer reviews occur at appropriate intervals throughout the development of scientific documents and analyses models.
7. Focus additional staff resources to ensure that end-users have the capacity to use project deliverables.
8. Improve development of project work plans and associated timelines to allow flexibility within project timeframes to adjust for delays in research due to seasonal variability and problems encountered with data collection or completion of identified research objectives.
9. Support innovative and creative research to ensure current science-based decision making.
10. Integrate marine protected area and fisheries management to foster ecosystem based management approaches, and to take advantage of data collection opportunities that could be used to inform management actions, and foster better understanding of fisheries dynamics within the context of a changing climate.

FUTURE OPC INVOLVEMENT

Several of the recommendations specifically entail working with partners in a collaborative manner and suggest a lead or supporting role for the OPC as part of their execution.