



PROGRESS REPORT

TO: California Ocean Protection Council
FROM: Jenn Eckerle, Deputy Director
DATE: May 23, 2019
SUBJECT: Draft 2019-2024 Strategic Plan

BACKGROUND:

The Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) previous strategic plan outlined priorities to protect coastal and ocean ecosystems between 2012 and 2017.¹ In early 2019, OPC staff initiated a process to develop an updated strategic plan (Draft Plan)² that would guide the agency's priorities, objectives and actions over the next five years, from 2019-2024. This progress report provides: 1) a summary of the 2012-2017 strategic plan; 2) an overview of new draft strategic plan, including how the structure and priorities have changed since the last plan; 3) the process to solicit public input, along with key themes from public comment; 4) and next steps on plan development and completion.

SUMMARY OF OPC'S 2012 – 2017 STRATEGIC PLAN:

OPC's previous strategic plan focused on the following five goals:

1. **Science-based decision making.** This goal focused on improving the use and sharing of scientific information, identifying priority science needs to inform management, and incorporating science into management decisions.
2. **Climate change.** This goal focused on improving understanding of climate-change related impacts on coastal and ocean ecosystems and human communities, and development of adaptation and mitigation strategies and management approaches to address sea-level rise and ocean acidification.

¹ A Vision for Our Coast and Ocean , California Ocean Protection Council Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2012-2017:
http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/2012-strategic-plan/OPC_042412_final_opt.pdf

² California Ocean Protection Council Strategic Priorities to Protect California's Coast and Ocean, 2019-2024:
http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/_media_library/2019/03/2019-2024-OPC-Strategic-Plan-draft.pdf

3. **Sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystems.** This goal focused on supporting science-based approaches to fisheries management; improving governance of California’s fisheries; promoting incentives for sustainable fisheries; and increasing coordination, science and outreach to ensure the long-term success of California’s marine protected areas.
4. **Coastal and ocean impacts from land.** This goal focused on integrating coastal and ocean resources into the state’s water management policies to minimize downstream impacts; increasing understanding and identifying policy and management approaches to address nutrient pollution, harmful algal blooms, and urban runoff; advancing science and action to reduce marine debris and its impacts on marine and coastal ecosystems; improving policy and management to restore natural sediment processes, increasing information to inform sediment-related decisions, and further understanding of coastal impacts from shoreline armoring.
5. **Existing and emerging ocean uses.** This goal focused on ensuring the protection of coastal and marine resources while balancing social and economic benefits of existing and emerging uses, and expressly including desalination, marine renewable energy and offshore aquaculture as priorities for OPC.

The previous plan also included a summary of OPC’s strategic approach and criteria used to identify priority goals and actions.

SUMMARY OF THE DRAFT 2019-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN:

OPC’s 2019-2024 Draft Plan is a roadmap to achieve the mission of protecting vibrant ocean ecosystems and the coastal communities and economies that rely on them. It is designed to set a five-year course for addressing the broad range of challenges facing California’s ocean and marine ecosystems while guiding targeted investments focused on critical issues and policy changes with the potential for greatest impact. The plan will also be used to articulate OPC priorities to decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public; leverage other conservation, research and funding efforts across the state in coordination with state agencies and other partners; and educate and cultivate champions in the Legislature.

In addition to updated goals, objectives and actions, which build on many of the priorities identified in the previous strategic plan and are described in more detail below, the 2019-2024 Draft Plan includes several organizational changes from OPC’s previous strategic plan. Those changes are as follows:

Revision of OPC’s mission and vision statements. The previous plan included the following mission statement for OPC: *“The mission of the California Ocean Protection Council is to ensure that California maintains healthy, resilient, and productive ocean and*

coastal ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.” The updated draft plan includes an update to OPC’s mission to more clearly articulate *how* we work to protect the ocean and coast and includes a new vision statement for lasting healthy coastal and marine ecosystems in California:

- **OUR MISSION:** OPC protects California’s coastal and ocean resources by advancing innovative, science-based policy and management, making strategic investments, and catalyzing action through partnerships and collaboration.
- **OUR VISION:** Healthy, resilient and productive coastal and ocean ecosystems in California for the benefit of current and future generations.

The role of science. OPC advances and integrates best available science throughout all our work. Rather than calling out a specific goal devoted solely to scientific inquiry, the Draft Plan includes monitoring and research priorities, and associated policy and management applications, within each of the goals described below.

Climate change. It is impossible to separate the individual effects of a changing climate from the broader ecological health and resilience California’s coast and ocean. As a reflection of this inextricable link, climate change has been interwoven in all OPC’s priorities. Our climate program will continue to address impacts and solutions related to ocean acidification, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and natural sediment supply, while increasing efforts around hypoxia, temperature, salinity and other climate-driven changes in the ocean. We will expand our cross-cutting work to increase understanding of climate change impacts on fisheries and fishing communities, the role that California’s marine protected areas can play in building resilience, the ability of seagrasses and kelp to sequester carbon, and the triggers and responses to harmful algal blooms.

Sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystems. In the previous strategic plan, these priority areas were addressed in a singular goal. While fisheries are clearly a critical component of healthy marine ecosystems, the focused work that OPC is conducting in each of these areas merits separate goals dedicated to these individual conservation priorities.

Land-sea connection. The Draft Plan continues to acknowledge the link between land-based activities and ocean health but includes these priorities in the climate change and water quality goals. The previous strategic plan had combined water quality, marine pollution and sediment management into one goal.

Sustainable ocean economy. The Draft Plan includes a new goal focused on protecting the ocean while encouraging sustainability in the blue economy. Issues within this priority area include marine renewable energy, aquaculture, offshore oil platform decommissioning, and artificial reefs.

Equity. Previous strategic plans did not identify environmental justice or social equity as priority components of OPC’s work. We are committed to more actively engaging with low-income and frontline communities and tribes to build trust, understand the challenges and needs associated with resource protection and coastal access, advance solutions, and ensure that OPC’s work provides benefits to *all* Californians. In the Draft Plan, we have incorporated equity as one of our organization values and prioritized the integration of environmental justice and social equity into OPC’s conservation work under Goal Six.

How we work. The Draft Plan includes a more detailed section on the tools OPC uses to protect coastal and ocean resources in California, which include science, partnerships, policy and funding. OPC uses each of these tools to identify and implement solutions that improve ocean governance, increase stewardship, and advance scientific understanding necessary to protect and conserve marine resources and the communities that rely on them.

Values. The Draft Plan includes a new section that outlines our values and the principles that guide our actions and define our culture as we work to conserve the health and diversity of ocean ecosystems for their intrinsic, environmental, aesthetic, educational, recreational and economic benefits. These values include: transparency; integrity; collaboration; interdisciplinary approach; innovation; stewardship; and equity.

UPDATED GOALS:

The 2019-2024 strategic plan includes the following six goals to achieve OPC’s mission and vision, many of which have cross-cutting objectives and actions:

1. **Safeguard coastal and marine ecosystems and communities in the face of climate change.** This goal focuses on improving scientific understanding of how climate changes is altering coastal and marine ecosystems; increasing ecosystem and human community resilience; raising awareness of climate change impacts; integrating changing ocean conditions into state governance; and improving coastal sediment management and understanding of coastal processes.
2. **Protect and restore coastal and marine ecosystems.** This goal prioritizes the long-term success of California’s marine protected area (MPA) network and leveraging MPAs to further enhance ecosystem resilience; promoting action to support healthy kelp forest ecosystems; and advancing habitat restoration including seagrasses and wetlands.
3. **Ensure thriving and sustainable marine fisheries.** This goal focuses on advancing fisheries science to inform sustainable management; promoting resilient fishing communities; encouraging market-based approaches; improving efficiency of fisheries data collection and data accessibility; advancing implementation of the

Marine Life Management Act Master Plan for fisheries; and reducing the risk of entanglement in fishing gear.

4. **Improve coastal and ocean water quality.** This goal focuses on reducing plastic pollution at its source; minimizing the impact of microplastics and microfibers; minimizing impacts from harmful algal blooms on ecosystems, fishing communities and the public; reducing nutrient runoff and other pollution that impacts water quality and exacerbates climate change impacts; identifying and addressing emerging contaminants; and minimizing impacts from marine invasive species.
5. **Protect the ocean and encourage sustainability in the blue economy.** This goal focuses on ensuring marine renewable energy and aquaculture projects minimize impacts to ecosystems, recreation and fishing communities; preparing local, state and federal agencies for oil and gas platform decommissioning; and investigating scientific issues related to the creation and management of artificial reefs.
6. **Strengthen organizational effectiveness.** This goal focuses on better integrating environmental justice and social equity into OPC's work; improving coordination of coastal and ocean policy decisions in California; and increasing OPC's visibility and influence by advocating for coastal and ocean protection at state, regional, national and international levels.

SOLICITING FEEDBACK AND PUBLIC COMMENT:

The strength of this plan and the impact of OPC's work over the next five years necessitates thoughtful engagement with OPC members, agency and other partners, and the public. On March 18, 2019, OPC staff provided an advanced copy of the Draft Plan to members of OPC, the OPC Science Advisory Team, and staff from the California Ocean Science Trust (OST). On March 25, the Draft Plan was released for a 30-day public comment period, which closed on April 19, 2019. On April 8, 2019, OPC and OST staff had a meeting with OPC's Science Advisory Team that included an in-depth discussion on the Draft Plan. In addition to the verbal feedback OPC staff received at that meeting, several members of OPC's Science Advisory Team provided suggestions in writing. OST's Executive Director also provided written comments.

Through the formal public comment period, OPC received 18 letters on the Draft Plan from social equity and environmental non-profits, scientists, plastics and offshore wind industry representatives, the Port of San Diego, Coastal Commission, and members of the general

public.³ Overall, the comments were quite positive and praised OPC for its thorough and ambitious strategic plan. Key themes from the public comment to strengthen the Draft Plan include:

- Prioritize actions and identify metrics of success.
- Include actions focused on coastal and ocean recreation.
- Acknowledge ocean deoxygenation as climate change driven impact in Goal One (Safeguard coastal and marine ecosystems and communities in the face of climate change) and include an action to increase scientific research on this issue.
- Strengthen environmental justice-related actions focused on impacts from: sea-level rise; agricultural areas and associated water quality impacts related to toxic pesticides and fertilizers; stormwater and wastewater impacts on water quality in marginalized communities; and workforce impacts/benefits associated with oil platform decommissioning.
- Expand strategies focused on community resilience to include the unique needs of ports, harbors and working waterfronts and their associated infrastructure for Public Trust uses.
- Include actions to further increase coordination with state agency partners for policy setting, leveraging investments and putting science to action.
- Include a call-out box or other approach for highlighting key state and federal agency partners and their role in helping accomplish goals in the Draft Plan.
- Increase focus on water quality impacts from wastewater treatment plants, septic systems, and pathogen pollution.
- Revise Goal Six (Strengthen organizational effectiveness) to be more actionable and to acknowledge that disadvantaged communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- Increase the prioritization of mariculture in all OPC's strategic goals.
- Include seafood traceability, piloting of ropeless gear, and other fisheries bycatch risk reductions as actions in Goal Three (Sustainable fisheries).
- Include desalination as a priority issue.
- Strengthen language throughout the plan to increase focus on estuarine protection and research.
- Include call-out box or other approach to articulate OPC's ongoing commitment to addressing new and emerging coastal and ocean issues.

³ Public comments can be viewed here: http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/_media_library/2019/05/Public-comment-on-Strategic-Plan_combined.pdf

NEXT STEPS:

This progress report is the initial step in soliciting meaningful input and direction from the Council on the priorities and actions in the Draft Plan. Staff looks forward to receiving high-level preliminary feedback from the Council at its May 23, 2019 meeting. To facilitate a more substantive dialogue, we propose scheduling an informal workshop between members of the Council and OPC staff (and open to the public) to inform Draft Plan revisions. We welcome direction from the Council on whether this workshop would provide an effective mechanism to communicate guidance to staff regarding suggested revisions or if there are other preferred approaches.

Additional feedback from OPC, OPC's Science Advisory Team, OST, and the public will inform revisions to the Draft Plan, with an updated version released for further public comment prior to final consideration by OPC. The final version of the plan will be designed and will include an Executive Summary highlighting OPC's goals and summarizing proposed science, policy and partnership actions over the next five years. OPC staff anticipates bringing a final draft for consideration by the Council at a future meeting in 2019.