

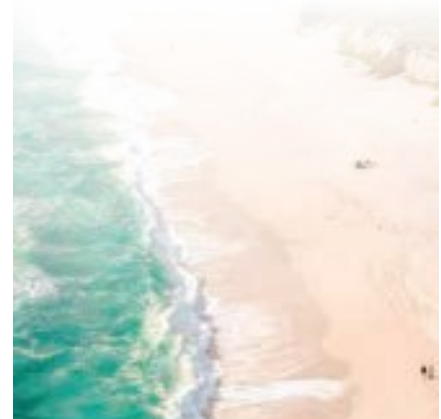
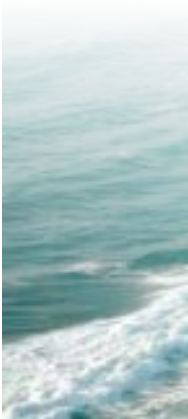


OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

June 20, 2020 – September 17, 2020

Providing an update on outcomes and accomplishments since the previous OPC Meeting.



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UPDATES BY STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change • Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions • Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity • Goal 4: Support Ocean Health through a Sustainable Blue Economy

GOAL 1: SAFEGUARD COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Week NYC – Ocean Climate Action

Climate Week NYC will take place from September 21-27, 2020, in coordination with the United Nations General Assembly. Annually, this event draws global attention and is recognized as the time and place for the world to showcase climate action and discuss how to do more leading up to the annual UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP). Given the new virtual format, global

participation is expected to exceed all previous years. This year, two virtual ocean events will be taking place, and California leadership has been requested to participate in both. One is primarily focused on ocean climate efforts in the United States, while the other is more globally focused. These events are titled: "US States Leading on Climate and Ocean Action" and "Creating a Blue-Green Future – Advancing ocean-climate solutions in the arc toward COP26".

Pacific Rim Ocean Climate Action Partnership (PROCAP) Workshop

On September 9, the signatories of PROCAP held their first ever workshop to discuss the ocean as a source of climate solutions, with particular emphasis on the various actions that each nation/state is taking to decarbonize the shipping sector. California's efforts in this area were presented by Bonnie Soriano, Branch Chief of the Freight Activity Branch for the California Air Resources Board, working on California Ocean Going Vessel Regulations and Incentive Programs. California was joined by Fiji, Panama, and the Ocean Conservancy in sharing ocean progress in mitigation efforts related to the shipping sector, while other signatories participated in the post-panel discussion.

Advancing Coastal Resilience – Request for Proposals

On August 7, OPC released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for up to \$8 million of Proposition 68 funds to support projects that advance coastal resiliency and nature-based adaptation strategies to sea-level rise. All information related to the Coastal Resilience RFP can be found at [OPC's Prop 68 webpage](#). Interested applicants must submit a letter of intent by 5 pm on September 21, 2020.

GOAL 2: ADVANCE EQUITY ACROSS OCEAN AND COASTAL POLICIES AND ACTIONS

Environmental Justice Interagency Coordination

OPC staff has joined federal and state agency partners (NOAA, BCDC, Coastal Commission, Coastal Conservancy, and State Lands Commission) to participate in monthly Environmental Justice (EJ) coordination calls that enhance cross-program relationships, collaboration, and allow for peer to peer information sharing to increase equity and EJ throughout our work. These calls help agencies identify partner needs/gaps, work through development of resources, and share challenges to address inequities along the California coast and within agency programs, policies and guidelines. On the most recent call, the group explored deep-dive topics that take a closer look at how agencies are evaluating the effectiveness of their EJ policies, approaches to meaningful public engagement, and analysis and improvement of various equity toolkits and training resources.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE COASTAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY

Chile California Council Annual Meeting

On September 12, the Chile California Council (a bi-national non-profit organization that promotes collaboration and knowledge exchange between Chile and California) hosted their annual meeting, which included remarks from Lieutenant Governor Kounalakis, Secretary Crowfoot, Energy Commissioner Andrew McCallister, OPC Deputy Director Jenn Eckerle, and high-level Chilean officials from the Ministries of the Environment, Energy, Science and Technology, and Foreign Affairs. OPC highlighted areas of opportunity for partnership related to ocean-climate action, marine protected areas, kelp restoration and equity and will continue to engage with Chilean colleagues on ocean conservation efforts.

Restoring and Protecting California's Kelp Ecosystems

On February 26, OPC [authorized](#) funding for removal of purple urchins by commercial fishermen, as well as associated ecological monitoring, in support of kelp forest recovery on California's north coast. COVID-19 delayed the start of this project, but in early August, a team of 13 fishermen were able to begin urchin removal operations at Noyo Bay. Since then, fishermen have completed their first pass through most of the restoration site, clearing approximately six acres of reef and landing a total of 21,276 pounds of purple urchin. Scientific monitoring by Reef Check California has documented new growth kelp on the cleared reef, indicating that removal operations may already be facilitating kelp recovery. In the coming weeks, divers will begin urchin removal operations at Caspar Cove, a second site targeted for urchin removal as part of this highly collaborative project.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List

OPC and CDFW continue to make progress in their effort to add California's MPA network to the [IUCN Green List](#) of Protected and Conserved Areas. On September 2, the Expert Assessment Group for the Green List (EAGL), a diverse group that includes representatives from a variety of California's ocean stakeholder communities, approved the movement of the MPA network from Applicant Phase to Candidate Phase. This major step forward in the evaluation process demonstrates strong alignment between California's MPAs and IUCN's global standard for effective, well-managed protected areas. The EAGL will reconvene in late September to continue its evaluation work.

Communications Strategy for 2022 Adaptive Management Review

At its June 19, 2020 meeting, the Council approved up to \$500,000 to develop a comprehensive communications plan that will help raise awareness of the first decadal management review of California's MPA network. [Two Requests for Proposals were released](#) and eligible proposals were reviewed for experience, creativity, and expertise in communications and California natural resources. The review committee will meet on September 24, 2020 to make its final selection. Applicants will be notified of the selection by the beginning of October.

West Coast Entanglement Science Workshop

Between August 25-September 3, OPC and The Nature Conservancy co-hosted the West Coast Entanglement Science Workshop in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and state fishery managers from California, Oregon and Washington. The workshop, which had over 200 registrants, featured presentations by researchers and targeted discussions with invited fishery managers and fishing industry and NGO stakeholders actively working to reduce risk of entanglement in West Coast fisheries. The workshop aimed to inform development of management strategies to reduce whale and sea turtle entanglement risk within US West Coast fixed-gear fisheries. Presentations from the workshop will be posted on the workshop webpage upon permission from the presenters – including recordings of the presentations if possible - and a workshop summary report will be available in fall/early winter 2020 that synthesizes the workshop discussions and key themes. For more information, please visit the [workshop webpage](#).

Dungeness Crab Task Force

The California Dungeness Crab Task Force is planning to hold its annual meeting virtually in October 2020. Specific meeting dates and an agenda will be posted on the [DCTF webpage](#) when available.

California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group

The California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group is planning to hold its annual meeting virtually in late September 2020. The Working Group will also be preparing for the 2020-2021 Dungeness crab fishing season, including the risk assessment process and the Working Group's process for providing recommendations to the CDFW Director in alignment with the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program.

California Drift Gillnet Transition Program

In February 2020, OPC approved \$1 million to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to support administration of CDFW's implementation of the [California Drift Gillnet Transition Program](#). The program is active, and participants are able to relinquish permits and nets, as appropriate, to CDFW and the net recycling entities, respectively, in exchange for payment per the program. So far, four participants have relinquished their permits and/or nets – two were "inactive" participants and two were "active" participants. OPC's \$1 million will support payments for the first 10 participants as well as associated net recycling fees. Net Your Problem and Bureo are approved by CDFW as "net destruction entities" and will be supporting recycling the nets.

Statewide Microplastics Strategy Progress

The OPC-SAT Working Group on microplastics is over halfway through their meetings to develop a risk assessment framework for the statewide Microplastics Strategy, as well as their work to identify data gaps that need to be addressed before performing risk assessments. OPC staff expect a final report from this project late this year or early next year. OPC staff are also reviewing research on microplastic fate and transport for inclusion in the Microplastics Strategy. Finally, the grants for the [wastewater and stormwater microplastics projects](#) that were approved at the last OPC meeting are now executed and work has begun.

Contaminants of Emerging Concern Expert Panel Meeting

OPC and the State Water Resources Control Board have previously co-funded an expert panel to provide advice on assessing contaminants of emerging concern in state waters. OPC and Water Board staff have worked to develop a state agency advisory group for the panel; a virtual meeting for the panel is scheduled for October 12-15.

Microplastics and Human and Ecological Health Effects Webinar Series

OPC staff, State Water Resources Control Board staff, and numerous international experts will be participating in a webinar series starting on October 19 to characterize microplastics and human and ecological health effects. This webinar series is hosted by the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, the San Francisco Estuary Institute, and the University of Toronto and is open to the public; information on the webinar series is available on the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project [website](#).

GOAL 4: SUPPORT OCEAN HEALTH THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

Promoting Sustainable Aquaculture

Please see the [Item 5 staff recommendation](#) regarding consideration of authorization to disburse funds to develop a statewide aquaculture action plan in alignment with the Strategic Plan. In federal waters, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently announced that the first two Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) in the nation will be located in the Gulf of

Mexico and Southern California. AOAs are included in President Trump’s [Executive Order on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth](#). The first step in the AOA process is to conduct stakeholder outreach as well as to compile and analyze all available pertinent data in the region to use for spatial analysis and simulation modeling of study areas within the Southern California AOA. By May 2021, NOAA plans to have finalized the specific regions within the Southern California AOA which are suitable for aquaculture operations. The Executive Order calls for a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to be finalized within two years of the AOA announcement, which occurred in late August 2020. Aquaculture within NOAA’s AOAs may be macroalgae, shellfish and/or finfish. OPC, along with CDFW and California Coastal Commission, have concerns about inconsistencies in the state and federal approach for finfish aquaculture in particular as the statewide aquaculture action plan proposed in item 5 focuses only on shellfish and macroalgae in state marine waters in alignment with the Strategic Plan.

Feasibility of Offshore Wind Energy for the California North Coast

OPC is funding and participating in a five-part webinar series hosted by the Schatz Energy Research Center at Humboldt State University on the feasibility of offshore wind energy development on California’s north coast. The series will begin September 14 and registration information is available at schatzcenter.org/wind. In each webinar, experts will share topical findings from the recently completed studies on environmental and geological systems; community needs and goals for shared ocean resources; energy generation and transmission; economics and job development; and port and coastal infrastructure. After each presentation, there will be a moderated panel discussion. The research studies were funded by OPC, the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

PROJECTS APPROVED BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Grantee	Project	Amount	Description
California Academy of Sciences	An early warning and forecasting system for biodiversity change on the California coast	\$199,974	This project will develop a volunteer-powered Early Warning and Forecasting System (EWFS) for biodiversity change on the California coast. The EWFS will focus on the early detection of abundance changes in native and non-native species particularly susceptible to environmental changes, via model-guided and volunteer-based monitoring of sentinel species and sites across vulnerable coastal habitats.

PERSONNEL NOTES

Maria Rodriguez. Maria joined the OPC team in August 2020. Maria will help lead OPC's efforts related to coastal wetlands, watersheds, coastal and marine water quality, as well as equity and environmental justice. Her prior experience includes working as an Environmental Planning Analyst and a Senior GIS Analyst at environmental consulting firms in Southern and Northern California. Maria has worked on CEQA and NEPA documentation for infrastructure and environmentally driven projects, including but not limited to habitat conservation and recreational projects. She has more than five years of experience using ArcGIS to focus on issues relating to urban planning, conservation, protection of natural resources, and environmental compliance. Maria holds a BS in Urban and Regional Planning from Cal Poly Pomona and is an active member of the American Planning Association, Association of Environmental Professionals, and Society for Conservation GIS. Maria enjoys bird watching, hiking, cycling, and spending time by the ocean. She loves LA Dodgers baseball, her two cats, and advocating for social justice.



Lindsay Bonito. Lindsay joined the OPC team in September 2020. Her work will support the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Management Program by working alongside state and federal agencies, coastal communities and tribal governments to collate the best available science for management decisions. Prior to OPC, Lindsay spent the last ten years at Scripps Institution of Oceanography working as a coral reef ecologist surveying reefs across the Pacific and Caribbean, and as a fish biologist examining the spatial and temporal variability of anthropogenic toxins in marine finfish around the world. She holds a BS in Environmental Systems from UC San Diego and is currently finishing her MS from Scripps where she is evaluating a federal experimental fishing program in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, NOAA, and CDFW. When she's not behind her desk, Lindsay can be found backpacking, climbing, paddling, and trying not to pearl while surfing.



COMMUNICATIONS

Communications Strategy for California's Coast and Ocean – Request for Proposals

The Request for Proposals for OPC's Statewide Communications Plan will be released on Wednesday, October 1, 2020. Details will be announced on OPC's website and listserv. Applicants will have until Friday, October 30, 2020 to submit proposals for this solicitation.

Media Highlights

"Commercial divers and conservationists have joined forces to restore the North Coast's marine ecosystem"

<https://mendovoice.com/2020/08/commercial-divers-join-forces-with-conservation-groups-to-restore-the-north-coasts-kelp-ecosystem/>

"Restoring Southern California's Kelp Forests"

<https://www.kcet.org/shows/socal-connected/restoring-southern-californias-kelp-forests>

“Big Oil Is in Trouble. Its Plan: Flood Africa With Plastic”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/30/climate/oil-kenya-africa-plastics-trade.html>

“McDonalds is testing a new system of reusable, returnable coffee cups”

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90548125/mcdonalds-is-testing-a-new-system-of-reusable-returnable-coffee-cups>

“How Big Oil Misled the Public into Believing Plastic Would Be Recycled”

<https://www.npr.org/2020/09/11/897692090/how-big-oil-misled-the-public-into-believing-plastic-would-be-recycled>

“U.S. Flood Strategy shifts to ‘Unavoidable’ Relocation of Entire Neighborhoods”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/climate/flooding-relocation-managed-retreat.htm>

“Some California cities think they’re safe from sea level rise. They’re not.”

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-17/sea-level-rise-flooding-inland-california>

“NOAA Announces Regions for First Two Aquaculture Opportunity Areas under Executive Order on Seafood”

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-announces-regions-first-two-aquaculture-opportunity-areas-under-executive-order>

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