

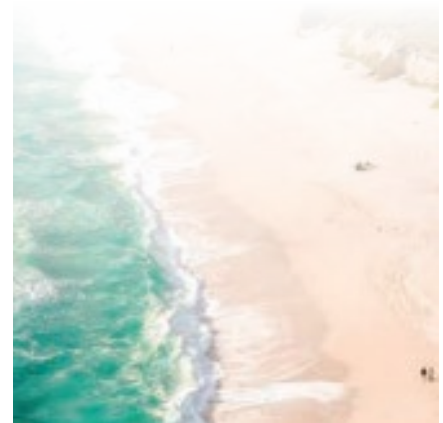
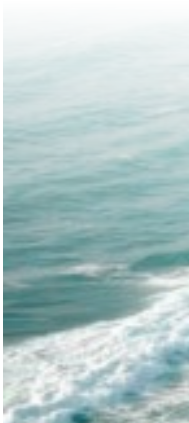


# OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

December 15, 2020 – February 16, 2021

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



### CONTENTS

UPDATES BY STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL.....	1
PROJECTS APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DELEGATED AUTHORITY .....	6
LEGISLATION.....	6
PERSONNEL NOTES.....	8
COMMUNICATIONS .....	9

### 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

##### Sea-Level Rise Coordination

In January, OPC convened an Executive Committee meeting for the Sea-Level Rise Leadership Team. The agenda focused on implementing the [Statewide Sea-level Rise Principles](#); identifying and directing priorities for the staff-level Working Group and development of a shared work plan for the coming months; and identifying gaps in knowledge and opportunities for improved

collaboration. The Executive Committee plans to meet quarterly as needed in 2020 as the implementation work plan is developed.

### **Proposition 68 Funding to Address Climate Change**

The Coastal Resilience solicitation released on August 7, 2020 has concluded with over \$8M in projects selected to advance for Council consideration (Item 5 on February 16, 2021 Council agenda). An additional Prop 68 solicitation is in development to focus on ocean acidification and hypoxia monitoring and research. The solicitation is in response to the Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (OAH) Science Task Force's [Enhancing California's Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Monitoring Network](#) report which identified priority monitoring and research needs to support state decision making and management.

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

### **Tribal Engagement Strategy and Listening Sessions**

OPC is seeking to collaborate with California Native American Tribes on the development of a Tribal Engagement Strategy that will provide a framework for meaningful partnership between OPC and Tribes (Strategic Plan Target 2.1.1). To support collaborative development of the Tribal Engagement Strategy, OPC recognizes the need for an improved understanding of Tribes' priorities for coastal and ocean management, as well as best practices for conducting outreach to Tribes in a respectful and effective manner. In coordination with the Governor's Office of the Tribal Advisor, OPC plans to hold listening sessions with coastal Tribes throughout 2021. These listening sessions will provide an opportunity for open discussion of Tribal priorities, allow for feedback on approaches for engaging with Tribal communities, and facilitate identification of current challenges and barriers to engagement.

### **Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts**

OPC will work with Cecilia Estolano and the Better World Group to develop a Diversity Equity and Inclusion plan (Strategic Plan Target 2.2.1). The plan will focus on how OPC can enhance both its internal day to day DEI work as well as its efforts to work more effectively with communities entitled to environmental justice. Currently, OPC staff is completing a ten-session DEI training focused on OPC work and led by Kikanza Nuri-Robins. This planning effort will build on this training, the DEI planning efforts of our fellow CNRA departments, and the guidance by trusted leaders in the DEI field throughout the state. The plan will be completed and brought to the Council in early in 2022.

### **Proposition 1 Grant Guideline Revisions**

OPC staff have revised the Proposition 1 (Prop 1) Grant Guidelines to focus OPC's Prop 1 funds on projects benefiting communities entitled to environmental justice (Communities). Communities include disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities as defined by Prop 1, California Native Tribes and Tribal Governments, and communities that score above 80% on [CalEnviroScreen](#) results. Projects benefitting Communities may include restoration, habitat enhancement, and resilience to climate change, including adaptation to sea-level rise, flooding, and shoreline erosion. The proposed final Prop 1 Grant Guidelines are before the Council for consideration at the February 16, 2021 meeting (Item 8a). If the revised Guidelines are approved, OPC staff anticipates releasing a solicitation for proposals in March.

### **GOAL 3: ENHANCE COASTAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY**

#### **Governor Newsom's Executive Order on Biodiversity**

In October 2020, Governor Newsom signed [Executive Order N-82-20](#), which directs the California Natural Resources Agency to work with state agencies and partners to advance strategies that will conserve at least 30% of California's land and waters by 2030, in support of biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. OPC staff are currently working to develop potential strategies for the application of the "30 by 30" target to California's coast and ocean. Priorities include a comprehensive inventory of protection measures currently in place in California, as well as the development of a definition of conservation that meets the spirit of Governor Newsom's Executive Order. OPC will work closely with Dr. Jennifer Norris, the lead on the CNRA biodiversity conservation and 30x30 efforts. We will work closely with a wide array of coastal stakeholders to develop the California ocean 30x30 strategy.

#### **Trash Monitoring Playbook and Field-Testing Report**

The [OPC-funded Trash Monitoring Methods Validation Project](#) will be presenting on the products and results of their project as part of the State Water Board's [Trash Monitoring Webinar Series](#) on February 18, 2021. This project field tested four methods of monitoring trash in state receiving waters, and determined the accuracy and precision of the methods, and how they compare to one another. This project addresses target 3.4.3 in OPC's Strategic Plan, and lays the groundwork for developing a baseline of plastic pollution monitoring data for the State. The final field-testing report and trash monitoring playbook is anticipated to be available to the public by March 2021.

#### **Panel Addressing Emerging Contaminants in Aquatic Ecosystems**

The OPC-funded expert panel on emerging contaminants in aquatic ecosystems held its first [public meeting](#) in October 2020. The panel is now holding standing meetings to address its charge and its final report is expected by the end of 2021. The panel's final report will include monitoring recommendations for emerging contaminants in state waters. The panel's report will also guide the development of a statewide management strategy for emerging contaminants, with a goal of preventing water quality impairments through management action.

#### **Gear Innovations Testing and Validation in the Commercial Dungeness Crab Fishery**

OPC, The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are collaborating to test fishing gear innovations in the California Dungeness crab fishery with local fishermen in real world fishing scenarios in order to reduce the risk of entangling whales and sea turtles in the future. This cooperative research project presents an opportunity for fishermen to test multiple pop-up fishing systems and rope systems and provide feedback on what gear types can work in the Dungeness crab fishery. NMSF is currently recruiting up to 15 active California commercial Dungeness crab fishermen who can provide expertise and feedback on the usability and reliability of the gear types under real-world fishing conditions during the 2020-2021 fishing season. More information can be found on the [project website](#).

#### **Competitive Grant Program for Reducing Entanglement Risk**

OPC has [provided funds](#) to Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) to issue a request for proposals to advance the science that will help managers reduce entanglements of whales and sea turtles in fishing gear while minimizing impacts on the fishing fleet. The Request for Proposals is now posted on the procurements section of the [PSMFC website](#). Proposals are due March 19th at 5pm (PST) for projects that will be in effect through December 2023.

will disperse up to \$1.85 million to fund proposals that directly support OPC's [Strategy for reducing the risk of entanglement in California fishing gear](#) by implementing scientific research projects and fostering collaborative partnerships. Applications submitted in response to this solicitation should advance implementation of the OPC's Strategic Plan and should support the principles outlined in the Entanglement Strategy. All projects will be geared to developing, aligning and improving information to reduce entanglement risk to whales and sea turtles and minimizing impacts to the fishing industry. Some of these types of projects have been discussed in the [entanglement science workshop](#) held in 2020. PSMFC and OPC expect to award funds to between four and six projects. Projects are likely to average about \$300,000 and range between \$250,000 and \$600,000.

### **West Coast Entanglement Science Workshop Report**

OPC and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) co-hosted an Entanglement Science Workshop from August 25 - September 3, 2020 to inform the development of management strategies to reduce whale and sea turtle entanglement risk within US West Coast fixed-gear fisheries. The event was developed 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 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. TNC has finalized the Workshop Summary Report which summarizes presentations and multi-sector discussion panels with a synthesis of key discussion themes and a detailed list of potential next steps and information needs. The report also includes abstracts for all science presentations and links to the additional resources available on the workshop webpage. The final workshop summary report, presentations, and recordings are all available on OPC's [workshop webpage](#).

### **OPC Science Advisory Team Working Groups**

In May 2019, OPC and the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) convened two Working Groups of the OPC Science Advisory Team to focus on science needs related to California's statewide marine protected area (MPA) network: (1) [MPAs and Climate Resilience Science Synthesis](#) and (2) [Data Needs and 2022 MPA Management Review Scientific Guidance](#). OST assembled interdisciplinary groups of scientists to respond to the working group charters and develop guidance documents for state MPA managers. Both groups have produced draft reports that are currently being undergoing scientific and policy review. OPC staff anticipate final reports to be completed and available to the public by the summer of 2021. A brief update of both reports will be presented during the February 16 Council meeting, as they provide important context and support for agenda Item 6 ("MPA Long-Term Monitoring and Data Analysis in Support of the 2022 Adaptive Management Review").

### **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. After a public call for proposals, Kearns & West was selected to carry out the communications plan for the state's MPA Management Program, and Strategic Earth Consulting was selected to create the outreach strategy to share information ahead of the first decadal management review occurring in December 2022. The contracts were finalized this month and both contractors have begun working collaboratively together and with OPC, CDFW, and the California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) to advance this important work.

### **Restoring and Protecting California's Kelp Ecosystems**

In February 2020, 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. Since then, fishermen have cleared approximately 8.5 acres of reef, and maintenance work and ecological monitoring are ongoing. Urchin removal operations are anticipated to begin at a second restoration site in Mendocino County, Albion Cove, in early spring 2021. Additionally, in June 2020, OPC [authorized](#) funding to launch a statewide Kelp Recovery Research Program in collaboration with California Sea Grant and the state's leading kelp researchers. A [suite of six solutions-oriented research projects](#) is now underway; these efforts are addressing knowledge gaps related to kelp forest ecosystem dynamics and the efficacy of various restoration approaches. OPC and CDFW staff are coordinating closely with research and restoration project leads to ensure that scientific results inform the development of proactive, science-based strategies for managing kelp forests in the face of changing ocean conditions.

## **GOAL 4: SUPPORT OCEAN HEALTH THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY**

### **Promoting Sustainable Aquaculture**

OPC staff has been integrating additional agency feedback and anticipates finalizing a set of Aquaculture Principles in the next several weeks. The Principles will provide near-term guidance to agency staff to protect the environment, effectively manage public trust resources, enhance food supply, and promote sustainable commercial aquaculture in California. Leadership and program staff from OPC, DFW, Fish and Game Commission, Coastal Commission (CCC), State Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission (SLC), the Department of Public Health, the Department of Food and Agriculture, and the State Water Resources Control Board will be reconvened in early spring to begin discussion on Principle implementation. The Principles will also inform the development the [Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan](#), which is being led by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) in partnership with California Sea Grant. Project kickoff for the Aquaculture Action Plan began on February 9, 2021.

In December 2020, OPC, DFW, SLC, and CCC submitted a joint comment letter to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) expressing concerns regarding potential environmental, economic and cultural impacts of the proposed Aquaculture Opportunity Areas being evaluated in Southern California. OPC staff have continued to coordinate closely with NOAA on this issue and will participate in quarterly meetings of NOAA's Southern California Offshore Aquaculture Interagency Working Group (which includes representatives from state and federal agencies and California Sea Grant) to track federal efforts and advocate for alignment between state and federal approaches to aquaculture development in the ocean.

### **Offshore Wind (OSW)**

The State Lands Commission (SLC) has received, and the staff is evaluating, two applications for floating offshore wind projects in state waters near Vandenberg Air Force Base. As part of the evaluation process, SLC has initiated state-federal discussions to solicit feedback and information. OPC is participating in this process. OPC staff are also working with the California Energy Commission and DFW staff on OSW planning efforts. Furthermore, we will work with CNRA Deputy Secretary for Energy, Matt Baker, and pertinent state agencies and departments to develop OSW sustainability principles to help California meet its bold renewable energy goals and that will be protective of coastal ecosystems, wildlife, fisheries, and culturally important resources.



## PROJECTS APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Grantee	Project	Amount	Description
UPSTREAM	Single-Use Foodware Reduction Toolkit and Training Program	~\$82,000	This project will fund a toolkit to guide local governments developing foodware ordinances, from inception to implementation. This toolkit is intended to support strategic policy development to address single-use plastics, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## LEGISLATION

OPC staff are tracking the following coastal and ocean-related legislative proposals that have been introduced as of February 10, 2021:

[SB 1 \(Atkins\)](#): This bill would amend part of the Coastal Act and require the Coastal Commission to include recommendations and guidelines for assessing and mitigating sea-level rise impacts in each coastal program. It would create the California Sea Level Rise State and Regional Support Collaborative and would require the collaborative to provide state and regional information to the public and support to local, regional, and other state agencies to mitigate sea-level rise. The bill would also authorize the Secretary for Environmental Protection to expend up to \$2,000,000 per year for the Environmental Justice Small Grant Program and would require up to \$500,000 of those funds to support grants working to address sea-level rise impacts.

[SB 27 \(Skinner\)](#): This bill would require the California Natural Resources Agency, in coordination with the California Environmental Protection Agency, the State Air Resources Board, and the Department of Food and Agriculture, to establish carbon sequestration goals for natural and working lands. This bill would also require the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research to maintain a registry to identify carbon removal or sequestration projects in the state that are seeking funding.

[SB 45 \(Portantino\)](#): This bill would enact the Wildfire Prevention, Safe Drinking Water, Drought Preparation, and Flood Protection Bond Act of 2022, which if approved by the voters, will authorize the issuance of \$5.51 billion in general obligation bonds to fund projects that support wildfire prevention, safe drinking water, drought preparation, and flood protection. The bill proposed \$970 million to protect coastal lands, bays and oceans from climate risk, with \$50 million of those funds allocated to OPC to increase climate resilience for coastal and ocean ecosystems.

[SB 54 \(Allen\)](#): This bill would enact the Plastic Pollution Producer Responsibility Act, which will reduce amount of disposables packaging and food waste entering waste stream.

[SB 80 \(McGuire\)](#): This bill would require a commercial fishing permit holder to relinquish a fish or parts of fish caught in California to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for the purpose of

collecting a biological sample. It would authorize crab traps to be set and baited 64 hours before the opening date of the Dungeness crab season regardless of Fish and Game District. The bill would also authorize the State Department of Public Health to adopt regulations to authorize the sale of eviscerated Dungeness crab that is caught in waters where the state Department of Public Health determined that the viscera of Dungeness crab exceed allowable levels of domoic acid. It would also require the State Department of Public Health to consult with the Dungeness Crab Task Force to establish the criteria for sale of Dungeness crab caught in areas subject to an evisceration order.

[SB 83 \(Allen\)](#): This bill would create the Sea-Level Rise Revolving Loan Program within the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (I-Bank) to provide low-interest loans to local jurisdictions for the purchase of coastal properties in their jurisdiction identified as vulnerable coastal property. It would also establish the Sea-Level Rise Revolving Loan Fund and would authorize the I-Bank to issue bonds and require the bond revenues be used for purposes of the Sea-Level Rise Revolving Loan Program.

[AB 11 \(Ward\)](#): This bill would require the Strategic Growth Council, by January 1, 2023, to establish up to 12 regional climate change authorities to coordinate climate adaptation and mitigation activities in their regions and coordinate with other regional climate adaptation authorities, state agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. This bill would authorize the regional climate change authorities to engage in certain activities to address climate change and would require the regional climate change authorities to annually submit a report to the council.

[AB 30 \(Kalra\)](#): This bill would express the intent of the Legislature to subsequently enact legislation that would improve access to nature for all people in the state and provide for recreational and educational opportunities, with a specific emphasis on increasing access for economically disadvantaged communities.

[AB 50 \(Boerner Horvath\)](#): This bill would establish the Climate Adaptation Center and Regional Support Network within the OPC to provide local governments facing sea-level rise challenges with information and scientific expertise necessary to proceed with sea-level rise mitigation.

[AB 51 \(Quirk\)](#): This bill would require the Strategic Growth Council to establish guidelines for the formation of regional climate adaptation planning groups by July 1, 2022. It would require the SGC, in consultation with certain state entities, to develop criteria for the development of regional climate adaptation plans by July 1, 2023.

[AB 63 \(Petrie-Norris\)](#): This bill would include restoration as an allowable use in the definition of a State Marine Conservation Area in the Marine Management Areas Improvement Act.

[AB 66 \(Boerner Horvath\)](#): This bill would appropriate \$2,500,000 from the General Fund to the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego to conduct research on coastal cliff landslides and erosion in the County of San Diego. It would require research to be completed by January 1, 2024 and a report provided to the Legislature with recommendations for developing a coastal cliff landslide and erosion early warning system based on that research no later than March 15, 2024.

[AB 67 \(Petrie-Norris\)](#): This bill would require state agencies to consider current and future impacts of sea-level rise when planning. It would require OPC and the Governor's Office of Planning and

Research to form a multi-agency working group on sea-level rise by March 2022 and would require OPC, in consultation with the working group, to develop standardized methodology and template for conducting economic analyses for any state-funded infrastructure project in coastal zone.

[AB 72 \(Petrie-Norris\)](#): This bill would enact the Coastal Adaptation Permitting Act of 2021 to establish a more coordinated and efficient regulatory review and permitting process for coastal adaptation projects.

[AJR 2 \(O'Donnell\)](#): This measure would request that the Congress of the United States and the United States Environmental Protection Agency take all measures necessary to prevent further damage to California's citizens, wildlife, and nature resources by the dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane waste dumped in the waters near Santa Catalina Island.

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## PERSONNEL NOTES

On January 22, 2021, Whitney Berry left OPC to work as a Senior Manager in Ocean Conservancy's Climate Program. Whitney began her career with OPC as a Sea Grant fellow in 2018 and transitioned to full-time staff in our climate change program a year later, helping advance OPC's work related to seagrass protection, ocean acidification, blue carbon, communications, and international climate efforts. We will miss Whitney terribly and are hopeful that our ocean-climate work will intersect with hers in the future. A [job announcement](#) for an Environmental Scientist in our climate change program has been posted; applications are due on February 26.

Recruitment efforts are currently underway for two other Environmental Scientist positions: Sustainable Fisheries Program Manager and Policy and Communications Program Manager. Application deadlines have passed and OPC leadership anticipates having both positions filled by late spring.

In March 2021, Meghan Zulian will be completing her National Science Foundation Fellowship with OPC. Meghan has led the development of an Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (OAH) section for OPC's State of the Coast and Ocean report. She has also been supporting the development of a Prop 68 solicitation focused on OAH research and monitoring. Meghan returns to her Ph.D. program at UC Davis which she hopes to complete in 2023.

**Sandra Fogg** joined OPC in January 2021 as a California State Sea Grant Fellow in our Marine Protected Areas and Marine Ecosystems Programs. Sandra supports OPC on projects ranging from MPA research and outreach, statewide biodiversity initiatives, and sustainable aquaculture and fisheries. She graduated from UC Santa Barbara's Bren School of Environmental Science & Management with a Master of Environmental Science and Management degree in 2020. Through the development of a web-based modeling tool, Sandra's thesis investigated the potential feasibility, productivity, and profitability of off-shore cobia aquaculture within Brazil's Exclusive Economic Zone. Prior to her fellowship, Sandra worked in multiple fields including environmental toxicology, pollution prevention, and fisheries.





**Kathryn Beheshti** joined OPC in February 2021 as a California State Sea Grant Fellow in our Climate Change Program. Kathryn supports OPC on efforts ranging from sea-level rise planning and projects, eelgrass conservation, and ocean acidification and hypoxia. She recently defended her Ph.D. research in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology department at UC Santa Cruz. Her research focused on plant-invertebrate interactions within the tidal marshes and eelgrass beds of Elkhorn Slough. By looking at anthropogenic stressors such as eutrophication and sea-level rise, her research investigated the biotic and abiotic drivers that compromise salt marsh resilience. Kathryn also enjoys sharing her love of field work and salt marshes with the public through extensive teaching and outreach.



OPC's 2020 California Sea Grant Fellows Michaela Miller and Matthew Warham will continue their fellowships in support of our climate and MPA work, respectively, until the end of April 2021.

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## COMMUNICATIONS

### Media Highlights

"Biden signs 'existential' executive orders on climate and environment"

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55829189>

"Looking ahead to US ocean policy, management and conservation under the Biden-Harris administration: Ocean policy experts weigh in"

<https://www.openchannels.org/news/skimmer-marine-ecosystems-and-management/looking-ahead-us-ocean-policy-management-and>

"Sea lions are dying from a mysterious cancer. The culprits? Herpes and DDT"

<https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2021-01-31/california-sea-lions-cancer-ddt>

"Near Coasts, Rising Seas Could Also Push Up Long-Buried Toxic Contamination"

<https://www.npr.org/2021/02/08/963673676/near-coasts-rising-seas-could-also-push-up-long-buried-toxic-contamination>

"Study Finds Microplastics in Human Placentas"

<https://science.thewire.in/health/study-finds-microplastics-in-human-placentas/>

"Commercial Crab Fishermen Sought to Test Innovative Fishing Gear"

<https://marinesanctuary.org/news/commercial-crab-fishermen-sought-to-test-innovative-fishing-gear/>

"New Coastal Water Quality Model Enable Better Beach Management"

[https://woodsintstitute.stanford.edu/system/files/publications/Coastal\\_Water\\_Quality\\_Modeling.pdf](https://woodsintstitute.stanford.edu/system/files/publications/Coastal_Water_Quality_Modeling.pdf)

"New Life for the Ocean: How Marine Protections Keep Our Waters Wild"

[https://www.eenews.net/assets/2021/02/04/document\\_pm\\_01.pdf](https://www.eenews.net/assets/2021/02/04/document_pm_01.pdf)

“Evidence that spillover from Marine Protected Areas benefits the spiny lobster (*Panulirus interruptus*) fishery in southern California”

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-82371-5>

“In the Oceans, the Volume is Rising as Never Before”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/science/ocean-marine-noise-pollution.html>

“Santa Barbara Approves Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Plan”

<https://www.independent.com/2021/02/03/santa-barbara-approves-sea-level-rise-adaptation-plan/>

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