



September 12, 2011

The Honorable John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources  
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council  
California Natural Resources Agency  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, CA 95814

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL: [opc.comments@scc.ca.gov](mailto:opc.comments@scc.ca.gov)

**Re: Comments on the California Ocean Protection Council Draft Strategic Action Plan, 2012 to 2017**

Dear Chair Laird and Ocean Protection Council Members:

On behalf of the undersigned groups representing hundreds of thousands of Californians, we thank you for the opportunity to provide the following comments on the California Ocean Protection Council Draft Strategic Action Plan for 2012 to 2017 (Draft Plan). As you know, the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) plays a key role in protecting and restoring the health of California's oceans for the benefit of all Californians.

We believe that the Strategic Plan should reflect OPC's role as a leader in ocean protection and restoration, in addition to its role as facilitator of the production and delivery of sound science on ocean resources and threats. OPC's effectiveness in achieving its goal of "conserve[ing] the health and diversity of ocean life and ecosystems"<sup>1</sup> will depend on how much it is willing to step out in front of threats to ocean life and ecosystems, as defined by its Strategic Plan. We offer below recommendations for strengthening the Draft Plan and we suggest specific revisions in each of the Draft Plan's five focal areas: Climate Change, Sustainable Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems, Land-Sea Interaction, Industrial Uses, and Science-Based Decision Making.

**I. THE DRAFT PLAN UNDER-EMPHASIZES THE OPC'S ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY ROLES AND SHOULD BE AMENDED ACCORDINGLY**

The California Ocean Protection Act (COPA) provides excellent statutory guidance to the OPC with respect to its leadership role. COPA directs the OPC not just to be a coordinator and facilitator, but also to be a leader by providing guiding principles for all state agencies to follow to implement COPA, helping ensure that agencies' effectiveness actually improves, and identifying changes in law and policy needed to further enhance governance effectiveness and ocean protection.<sup>2</sup> The OPC is thus the state's lead

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<sup>1</sup> Public Resources Code § 35510(b)(1).

<sup>2</sup> Public Resources Code §§ 35500 *et seq.*

entity tasked with ensuring better governance of ocean resources according to “principles of sustainability, ecosystem health, and precaution.”<sup>3</sup>

As stated in the draft Strategic Plan, now is the time to take a bold and focused approach. We urge the OPC to include in its Draft Plan a focus on leading state agencies to achieve greater ecosystem protection, in addition to its role as a vessel for coordinating science and distributing potential bond funding. Specifically, we recommend the following revisions.

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The OPC play a leadership role in guiding state agencies to achieve greater ecosystem protection, in addition to serving as a vessel for coordinated science and distributing potential bond funding. Certainly these are helpful activities, but they do not fulfill the ocean leadership and advocacy role articulated in COPA. The text box on page 6 emphasizes integration and coordination of existing agency initiatives without explicitly articulating that the fundamental purpose of agencies working together is to advance more effective ocean protection and management. To remedy this, we recommend that the last bullet on page 6 be moved to the text box as follows:

*The Legislature finds and declares that the purpose of this division is to integrate and coordinate the state's laws and institutions responsible for protecting and conserving ocean resources . . . to provide a set of guiding principles for all state agencies to follow, consistent with existing law, in protecting the state's coastal and ocean resources.*

#### **B. THE FIRST FIVE YEARS**

We appreciate the OPC for including examples of where it has been effective in advancing meaningful ocean policy, such as the OPC resolutions on once-through-cooling (OTC) and marine debris. Because of the significance of the OPC’s work on advancing sound OTC policy, this action should be included as a “Key OPC Accomplishment” in the text box on Page 10.

In addition, in the “Lessons Learned” section, the final Strategic Plan should include the following key finding from the OPC’s independent effectiveness evaluation. This finding should serve as a foundational principle for OPC’s actions over the next five years:

*When the OPC does undertake a policy issue, the best outcomes will occur when [the OPC] embraces its leadership role, follows through each issue to a logical conclusion, and promotes accountability, both for itself, and for its partner agencies.*<sup>4</sup>

To improve the clarity and readability in Section I of the Draft Plan, we recommend removing or substantially condensing the background text on pages 3-6 and the text in Section B on pages 5-6.

### **II. RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN AND CLARIFY OPC’S FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN**

We appreciate the work of the OPC and its staff to identify critical ocean issues in the Draft Plan. However, the current introductory text in each of the Focal Area and Issue sections in many cases does not directly inform the objectives, actions, and metrics that follow. We suggest that the introductory text in each of the five Focal Areas be uniformly restructured to include three parts listed below. We provide an example of how this format can be applied in Attachment 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Public Resources Code §35505(c) – (e).

<sup>4</sup> California Ocean Protection Council, White Paper: Towards Improving the Ocean Protection Council (Sept. 28, 2010) (White Paper), p. 3.3, available at [http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/project\\_pages/Evaluation/OPC\\_Eval\\_Final.pdf](http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/project_pages/Evaluation/OPC_Eval_Final.pdf).

Proposed format for the introduction sections of each Focal Area:

1. Where the OPC/State of California is now with respect to the Focal Area
2. A statement of prevailing science; and
3. A vision of where the OPC wants to be on the issue.

Also, in many instances throughout the Draft Plan, the introductory for both the Focal Areas and Issues Area would benefit from careful revision to reduce repetitiveness and improve overall cogency.

Below we provide specific comments on the policy elements of the Draft Plan, including revisions to the goal statements. Recognizing the OPC's resource constraints, we recommend that the OPC focus on fewer and more effective, robust, and lasting priority actions. Accordingly, we have identified specific issues and actions that we believe can be deleted from the final Strategic Plan.

**A. CLIMATE CHANGE FOCAL AREA**

OPC's leadership in guiding state agencies on issues relating to ocean and coastal conservation is particularly important in the context of climate change adaptation, where disjointed state and local policies have the potential to undermine affirmative efforts to address sea level rise and ocean acidification. Accordingly, the final Strategic Plan should reflect OPC's leadership in climate-related policy, in addition to setting the scientific agenda for improving our understanding of issues related to climate change. The final Plan should highlight not only the critical threats to ecosystems related to climate change, but also threats to the services these ecosystems provide to humans, such as storm protection, food, and recreation. We recommend the following revisions to strengthen the OPC's leadership role in this focal area.

**i. GOAL**

Given the OPC's limited resources and the existence of state laws and regulations that already guide climate mitigation activities, the Council should not endeavor to "encourage development of ...mitigation measures."<sup>5</sup> Removing climate mitigation activities from the final Strategic Plan would enable the OPC to focus on climate-related issues it is better suited to address, such as climate adaptation. However, the OPC can still support the state's greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts by continuing its commitment to carefully reviewing energy-intensive ocean and coastal uses such as desalination, and to supporting low-energy, sustainable water supply projects such as low impact development (LID).

Accordingly, we recommend that the goal statement be revised as follows:

*Goal: Increase the resilience of coastal ecosystems and communities to sea level rise and ocean acidification.*

**ii. ISSUE 1: STORM EVENTS, COASTAL FLOODING, AND SEA-LEVEL RISE**

The final Strategic Plan should not segregate its objectives and strategies into the two purportedly independent issues of human community impacts and ecosystem impacts. This structure reinforces the common misconception that issues of community well-being and ecosystem health are disconnected and mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary: climate adaptation strategies that incorporate natural resource

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<sup>5</sup> California Ocean Protection Council, Draft Strategic Action Plan (2011), p. 17, (Draft Strategic Plan) *available at* [http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/docs/Documents\\_Page/Strategic%20Plan/OPC\\_DRAFT\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_110801\\_for%20public%20review.pdf](http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/docs/Documents_Page/Strategic%20Plan/OPC_DRAFT_Strategic_Plan_110801_for%20public%20review.pdf).

values and management can result in positive feedbacks for both people and biodiversity.<sup>6</sup> Nature-based adaptation approaches— where natural resources, systems and processes are leveraged as part of a comprehensive adaptation strategy— can help human and natural communities respond effectively to the unavoidable impacts of a changed climate by building resilience and reducing vulnerability within these communities.

Accordingly, we recommend revision of Issue 1 by consolidating ecosystem enhancement and community planning and protection goals into an integrated set of objectives, actions and metrics aimed at improving the health of coastal ecosystems both to ensure their long-term persistence and to improve the resilience of human communities.

Tidal marsh restoration and protection is one of the best available tools to facilitate ecosystem and community resilience to climate change. Tidal wetlands provide a first line of defense against sea level rise by protecting coastal development and human communities from storms, enhancing water quality, and slowing erosion.

Accordingly, we urge the OPC to incorporate objectives and actions related to coordinating existing scientific and monitoring endeavors, and to providing leadership in translating these undertakings into state-level policy for managing climate change impacts on tidal wetlands. We also urge the OPC to craft objectives and actions that expedite the development of policies that promote tidal wetlands protections, along with the processes that sustain them. For example, OPC could integrate references to sediment management agencies and processes, currently on pages 32-33 in the Land-Sea Focal Area (e.g. Action 8.2.1: “Make tools available to agencies and other users to improve planning and decision making related to SLR and sediment disposal or reuse.”), into the Climate Change section with additional information about managing sediment for marsh accretion and natural flood protection.

We urge the OPC to incorporate in its final Strategic Plan objectives and actions to implement the California Adaptation Strategy (CAS), which reflects California’s leadership in responding to climate change. In 2009, the OPC led the development of the Coastal and Ocean Resources Section of the CAS in collaboration with numerous state agencies. The final Strategic Plan should incorporate nature-based adaptation strategies outlined in the CAS, including:

- “[I]dentify priority conservation areas and recommend lands that should be considered for acquisition and preservation [in the face of sea level rise].”<sup>7</sup>
- Establish decision guidance for managed retreat and/or removal of existing non-essential development in hazard prone areas, as well as public projects that impede natural sand replenishment on our coast.
- Establish decision guidance for projects that would place development in undeveloped areas already containing critical habitat, and those containing opportunities for tidal wetland restoration, habitat migration, or buffer zones.
- Encourage projects that protect critical habitats, fish, wildlife and other aquatic organisms and connections between coastal habitats.

### **iii. ISSUE 2: ECOSYSTEM IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

We commend the OPC for recognizing the significant impacts of ocean acidification on ocean ecosystems. Objectives 2.1 and 2.2 indicate that the OPC will work to “improve understanding of ocean

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<sup>6</sup> CBD [Convention on Biological Diversity]. 2009. *Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Report of the Second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change*. Technical Series No. 41. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Montreal, Canada. 126 pp.

<sup>7</sup> California Natural Resources Agency, “2009 California Climate Adaptation Strategy: A Report to the Governor of the State of California in Response to Executive Order S-13-2006, pp. 74-78 ” (CA Climate Adaptation Strategy), *available at* [www.climatechange.ca.gov/adaptation](http://www.climatechange.ca.gov/adaptation).

acidification and identify opportunities to adaptively manage its impacts,” and “increase understanding of climate change effects on marine ecosystems.” However, ocean acidification poses too grave and imminent a threat to California’s marine ecosystems for the OPC to limit its activities to improving understanding of this issue. A rapidly-growing body of research supports the thesis that “ocean acidification has already decreased mean surface water pH in the California Current System to a level that was not expected to happen for open-ocean surface waters for several decades.”<sup>8</sup> California research institutions and networks, such as the California Current Acidification Network (C-CAN), need agency support to overcome considerable obstacles in assessing statewide ocean acidification impacts as soon as possible.

We recommend the creation of actions that reflect a stronger leadership role for the OPC on this issue. These actions may include:

- OPC and Ocean Science Trust will work with NOAA, the State Water Board, Marine Monitoring Enterprise, and the North Central and Southern California Ocean Observing Systems on the creation of a network charged with housing, organizing, distributing and summarizing existing data on ocean acidification for policymakers and the public, and identifying data gaps and research needs.
- Develop a suite of best practices for ocean acidification monitoring, including physical and biological indicators, ecosystem changes and carbon dioxide sources in conjunction with U.S. EPA, and other cooperating federal agencies and research institutions.
- OPC and OST will work with other state agencies to identify the near-coastal ecosystems that are most sensitive to ocean acidification, and develop formal recommendations for action to abate other threats to these ecosystems, reducing the pressure on them and enhancing their overall health. The Strategic Plan should note that California’s new system of marine protected areas can contribute to both monitoring and resilience with respect to ocean acidification.

### **C. SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS FOCAL AREA**

We appreciate the OPC’s ongoing commitment to improving ecosystem protection and advancing fisheries sustainability in California. The Draft Plan includes appropriate objectives for this focal area, and generally identifies suitable actions and metrics. We recommend the following revisions to strengthen the OPC’s leadership role in this focal area. We suggest moving the reference to the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision process currently being convened under AB 2376 from page 24 to the opening section of this chapter. The outcome of the Vision process will likely relate to a broad range of fisheries and ecosystem protection issues and not only to fisheries management.

#### **i. GOAL**

We recommend that the goal statement be revised as follows:

*Goal: Ensure the long-term health of marine ecosystems and fisheries, and protect, restore, and enhance California’s living marine resources for the enjoyment and use of current and future generations.*

#### **ii. ISSUE 3: SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES**

We support the OPC’s commitment to seeking out innovative and market-based approaches to incentivize California fishermen to fish more sustainably as well as improve profitability. We recommend the

following specific revisions to strengthen this issue area and to better ensure that the proposed actions and metrics are more directly and explicitly linked to the objective of improved sustainability.

Objective 3.1 should be shortened to: *“Improve the sustainability of fisheries.”* Projects and programs that will help achieve this objective are actions and therefore do not belong in the objective itself.

Under Action 3.1.3, the metric *“Guidelines for Community Fishing Associations developed”* should be revised to specifically include standards or criteria for ensuring ecosystem health and promoting ecosystem protection. Similarly, the metric *“Increased number of CFAs or Regional Fishing Associations (RFAs) along the state”* should also be revised to make clear that only CFAs and RFAs with adopted standards related to sustainability and ecosystem protection will be “counted” as a measure of effectiveness under this metric.

Also under Action 3.1.3, we recommend deleting the following metric: *“Number of jobs created by the fishing industry through crew registry or other means documented.”* As noted in the introductory text, many management approaches to improving sustainability include increasing the value of fisheries while lowering the volume of fish landed. Accordingly, such innovations may not always lead to *more* jobs; instead they may lead to fewer, better jobs, as well as more fish in the ocean.

### **iii. ISSUE 4: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

The Draft Plan should note that while the Marine Life Management Act recognizes the importance of healthy ecosystems and requires fisheries management improvements, that Act has been only partially implemented to date. The OPC should support innovative approaches to advance the intent of the MLMA with a preference towards projects that integrate fisheries management with marine protected areas.

### **iv. ISSUE 5: LEVERAGING INVESTMENTS AND REALIZING BENEFITS**

We strongly support the OPC’s commitment to an effective science-based statewide system of marine protected areas. We appreciate the Draft Plan’s discussion of the importance of leveraging the valuable investments the state has made in the creation of MPAs to date. While major progress has been made, California still needs to finish the MPA design process and integrate MPAs into an overall management framework for marine resources in the state.

The final Strategic Plan should acknowledge that new and existing human activities can have adverse impacts on marine life and habitat in MPAs, thus undermining the state’s investment in MPAs and healthy ecosystems. We encourage the OPC to work with the Department of Fish and Game to develop the process called for in the Marine Life Protection Act to evaluate proposed projects to determine and highlight those impacts, recommending measures to avoid or fully mitigate any impacts inconsistent with MLPA goals and guidance.<sup>9</sup> This process should be developed with input from relevant agencies and the public. It should include procedures for providing standardized public notice and opportunity to comment on evaluation of particular impacts.

We urge strengthening of Actions 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 so that these actions do not merely “identify opportunities” for improved management, but instead actually advance those improvements. Accordingly, we urge revision of Action 5.2.1 to read: *“Advance integrated management of ocean resources through means including project review, regional MPA implementation agreements, fisheries management plans, and the SWRCB’s Ocean Plan update.”*

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<sup>9</sup> California Fish and Game Code Section 2862.

Under Action 5.2.1, we urge inclusion of the following new metric: “*State agencies including the Department of Fish and Game, California Coastal Commission, California State Lands Commission and others explicitly consider the activity’s adverse impacts to MPAs in their permit and lease review processes.*”

We recommend revising Action 5.2.2 to read: “*Reduce pollution impacts to MPAs by working with the SWRCB and other appropriate entities.*”

We urge deletion of Action 5.2.3 related to Aquatic Invasive Species. It is not clear why this action is included under Issue 5 as it does not appear to relate to MPAs.

### **C. LAND-SEA INTERACTION FOCAL AREA**

As OPC recognizes in its Draft Plan, land-sea interaction is a very broad focal area that could arguably include every form of land-based pollution and many coastal processes. Additionally, there are myriad agencies and organizations charged with managing our state’s water resources, and it would be extremely resource-intensive to address most major water quality and water supply issues. Given the difficulties inherent in this focal area, it is critical that OPC identify in the final Strategic Plan specific actions and objectives that it is well-suited to address and where it can best leverage previous work and investments.

#### **i. GOAL**

We recommend that the goal statement be revised as follows:

*Goal: Ensure that activities that span the land-sea interface are managed in a manner that helps sustain healthy marine ecosystems, public health, and the state’s coastal and ocean economy.*

#### **ii. ISSUE 6: INTEGRATING WATER POLICY**

The “Integrating Water Policy” section encompasses so many issues that it would be very difficult to measure work and progress on this topic over the next five years. We suggest dividing this issue into more manageable sections, such as water quality and water flows, and include more detailed, achievable, and specific objectives, actions, and metrics.

For example, the OPC should draft a set of objectives, actions and metrics to implement its 2008 Resolution on Low Impact Development (LID) coast-wide, with a particular focus on reducing pollution into Areas of Special Biological Significance and Marine Protected Areas. LID is an effective and cost-efficient strategy that curtails impacts to coastal waterways caused by land-based polluted runoff and generates low-energy localized water supplies.

The OPC should also identify areas where it can coordinate agency work on water issues to improve efficiency and efficacy. For example, the OPC could improve water quality enforcement by completing the pilot project previously initiated to coordinate an integrated enforcement effort between the Department of Fish and Game and the State Water Board. An example metric could be “Establishment of a pilot integrated Water Board-DFG enforcement program in at least one Regional Water Board region.”

#### **iii. ISSUE 7: MARINE DEBRIS**

We appreciate the OPC’s commitment to reducing marine debris in California and maintaining its historic commitment to this issue. The OPC can strengthen its leadership role on marine debris by continuing to promote debris reduction policies and advancing innovative methods of reducing debris in partnership

with industry, non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders. We urge the OPC to include in its final Strategic Plan specific actions from its 2007 marine debris resolution that are focused on “top priority solutions”, especially actions to reduce single-use plastic packaging, remove derelict fishing gear, and ban toxic plastic packaging.

We also urge reorganization of Objectives 7.1 and 7.2 to clarify that the OPC’s policy objective is reduction of marine debris rather than simply agencies working together. Specifically we recommend that Objective 7.1 be broadened to: “*Support initiatives that will reduce marine debris*” and the current Objective 7.1 and 7.2 be converted to actions. Under this new structure, the actions under Objective 7.1 would be as follows:

- Action 7.1.1: “*Work with relevant agencies to develop policy recommendations related to high priority actions for reducing marine debris.*”
- Action 7.1.2: “*In support of the OPC’s policy recommendations and in partnership with relevant agencies, develop and disseminate science-based information to policy makers and the public about the costs and impacts of marine debris.*”
- Action 7.1.3: “*Initiate a collaborative effort with relevant agencies, industry, non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders to develop innovative methods of reducing marine debris.*”
- Action 7.1.4: “*Collaborate with the West Coast Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Health Marine Debris Action Team and other stakeholders to generate new information needed to advance marine debris reduction policies.*”
- Action 7.1.5: “*Support the SWRCB’s adoption and implementation of a statewide trash policy.*”

#### **iv. ISSUE 8: SEDIMENT MANAGEMENT**

We recommend deleting the “Sediment Management” issue area and integrating the objectives and actions listed here into other sections such as sea level rise adaptation and sustainable fisheries.

### **D. INDUSTRIAL USES FOCAL AREA**

We appreciate the OPC for acknowledging that there are a growing number of new and existing human uses of the ocean that must be carefully planned for and managed to ensure healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems and thriving human communities. Accordingly, we recommend that the title of this focal area be broadened as: “*Existing and emerging ocean uses.*” We also recommend moving the underlined statements in the introductory text on pages 33 to 34 to the new issue area below, “*Managing Multiple Uses.*”

#### **i. GOAL**

We recommend that the goal statement be revised as follows:

*Goal: Ensure that human uses of California waters are planned and managed in a way that protects and conserves healthy ecosystems and the economic, social, and cultural services they provide.*

#### **ii. PROPOSED NEW ISSUE: MANAGING MULTIPLE USES**

Renewable energy, aquaculture, and desalination are prime examples of emerging ocean uses that require proactive planning and management. We thank the OPC for addressing these issues in the Draft Plan and offer suggestions below for strengthening the proposed actions under each use. At the same time, it is

urgent that the OPC address the impacts of multiple uses on the health of marine ecosystems. Managing these uses one-by-one does not sufficiently account for the “layering” of new activities on existing uses of the ocean, resulting in often significant cumulative impacts. There is also a need to proactively assess the best uses (or non-uses) of the ocean in a way that sustains ecosystem health and minimizes conflicts between the uses. Accordingly, we urge the OPC to create a new issue area, “*Managing Multiple Uses*,” and develop objectives and actions that address multiple-use management through an area-based approach. In developing actions and metrics under this new issue area, we urge the OPC to ensure that the directives of AB 2125 are satisfied by explicitly referring to the importance of scientific and geospatial information in managing multiple uses of the ocean.

We recommend the following action under the new issue area: “*Develop and integrate into state agencies planning approaches that promote evaluation of and planning for existing and emerging uses of the ocean. These approaches should use scientific and geospatial information and account for the cumulative impacts of these uses.*”

### **iii. ISSUE 9: DESALINATION AND ONCE-THROUGH-COOLING**

We support the OPC’s commitment to identifying and mitigating the impacts of desalination and once-through-cooling on ocean ecosystems, as described in the Draft Plan. We strongly encourage the implementation of the OPC’s 2006 resolution on OTC and urge the Council to continue to support the phasing out of OTC at coastal power plants in California. We also recommend that the Council work aggressively to develop policy recommendations on desalination to prevent unnecessary adverse effects of this technology on ocean life and habitats.

### **iv. ISSUE 10: MARINE RENEWABLE ENERGY**

We strongly support the work of the Marine Renewable Energy Working Group to increase agency coordination and enhance availability of information necessary for California to reap the gains of new renewable energy projects that are carefully and appropriately sited to minimize negative ocean ecosystem impacts.

We recommend replacing Action 10.1.3 with a more specific action as follows: “*Develop a geospatial information management tool that will help plan for and identify potentially appropriate locations for marine renewable energy.*”

### **v. ISSUE 11: AQUACULTURE**

The OPC should play a leadership role in ensuring that ocean aquaculture in California proceeds in an environmentally-acceptable manner. In 2006, the legislature passed SB 201, setting out an explicit and robust set of standards for production within the waters of the state. This issue, however, is complicated by efforts underway to advance ocean aquaculture in federal waters, beyond the three mile state limit. Given this current dynamic, several changes would strengthen the Draft Plan and OPC’s role. In particular, three objectives should be developed; one should relate to the state’s role in completing the Programmatic EIR, the second should relate to the state-federal intersection, and the third should relate to research priorities and federal funding.

We recommend revising Objective 11.1 to read: “*SB 201’s PEIR provides a forward looking, scientifically robust framework to regulate current and future ocean aquaculture facilities at an ecosystem scale.*”

Objective 11.1 should be revised to become Objective 11.2 and read: “*Coordinate state input on implementation of NOAA’s national marine aquaculture policy to help ensure that any resulting activities in federal waters are consistent with state policies for ocean aquaculture as articulated in SB 201.*”

Action 11.1.2 should be converted to a third Objective and revised to read: *Objective 11.3: “Promote basic research that addresses high priority concerns associated with expansion of marine finfish aquaculture in waters off the state.”*

## **E. SCIENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING – CROSS-CUTTING AREA**

We support the OPC in its commitment to advancing a science-based approach to ocean and coastal management in California. In particular, we believe OPC’s efforts to develop a scientific and geospatial information system will enhance decision-making throughout all of the focal areas and ultimately improve ocean health. This system—if made up of relevant and accessible information tools and products—will be especially useful in planning for emerging ocean uses and multiple-use management. It will also help fortify California’s standing as a technological and environmental leader. We recommend the following revisions to strengthen the OPC’s leadership role in this cross-cutting area.

### **i. GOAL**

We recommend that the goal statement be revised as follows:

*Goal: Improve ocean and coastal decision making through more effective use of scientific and geospatial information.*

### **ii. ISSUE 12: IMPROVING THE USE AND SHARING OF SCIENTIFIC AND GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION**

We recommend revising actions under Issue 12, Objective 12.1 to focus exclusively on the OPC’s role in three areas: (1) helping transform existing data into relevant and meaningful information tools and products; (2) developing a system to enhance information accessibility and sharing among agencies; and (3) taking steps to ensure use of the information system to improve decision-making in California and potentially throughout the West Coast region. We feel that some of the actions currently listed under Objective 12.1 (specifically Actions 12.1.3, 12.1.4, and 12.1.6) are steps that should be taken, but are not sufficient unless directed toward advancing the three action areas included above.

### **iii. ISSUE 13: IDENTIFYING HIGH PRIORITY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION NEEDS**

Actions 13.1.1 and 13.1.3 are related to the OPC’s internal operations and do not need to be highlighted in the final Strategic Plan, unless they are incorporated into Part III, Section D, which describes similar types of procedural activities that underlie all of the OPC’s actions. We recommend deleting these actions or combining them as one action as follows: “*Working with the OST and SAT, OPC ensures research actions are: (1) relevant to focal areas in the strategic plan, (2) critical for improving management, and (3) innovative and high-impact.*”

We recommend moving Action 13.1.2 under Objective 12.1.

**iv. ISSUE 14: BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY WITHIN AGENCIES TO INCORPORATE SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION INTO MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

Many actions listed under Issue 14 also relate to the OPC’s internal operations and therefore do not necessarily belong in the final Strategic Plan. We recommend moving or deleting Actions 14.1.1, 14.2.2, and Action 14.2.4 and moving 14.2.3 to Objective 12.1.

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The most determinative factor of OPC’s efficacy over the next five years will be the vigor with which the Council implements its final Strategic Plan. The Ocean Protection Council White Paper, *Toward Improving the Ocean Protection Council*, found that “the best outcomes will occur when [the OPC] embraces its leadership role, follows through each issue to a logical conclusion, and promotes accountability, both for itself, and its partner agencies.” Each of these three objectives is essential to ensuring that the OPC adds significant value to existing state efforts to achieve healthy ocean ecosystems. We continue to support the OPC in its efforts to recommend new policies and facilitate the implementation of existing policies that offer solutions to the biggest challenges that threaten ocean health in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. We look forward to continued work with the OPC and its staff to craft and implement a bold and focused final Strategic Plan.

Sincerely,



Leila Monroe  
Natural Resources Defense Council



Sara Aminzadeh  
California Coastkeeper Alliance



Kaitlin Gaffney  
The Ocean Conservancy



Aimee David  
Monterey Bay Aquarium



Sarah Newkirk  
The Nature Conservancy



Bruce Reznik  
Planning and Conservation League



Joe Geever  
Surfrider Foundation

## **Attachment 1**

### **Example Introductory Text: Sustainable Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems Focal Area**

#### **Where we are now**

The waters off California's coastline boast some of the most productive and diverse marine ecosystems in the world. However, California's marine ecosystems face numerous threats, including pollution, habitat destruction, historical overfishing, and climate change. California's current fisheries management framework is a result of over 100 years of laws and regulations that were adopted on a piecemeal and ad hoc basis. Over its first five years, the OPC has worked to advance healthy marine resources by working with state, federal, and tribal organizations to improve coordination and provide resources and science based information to inform management decisions. In 2010, California passed Assembly Bill 2376 requiring the Secretary for Natural Resources to convene a committee to develop a strategic vision for improved management of fish and wildlife management in the state. A planning process addressed to meet this goal is now underway. California is also pursuing priority ecosystem health management measures under the Marine Life Management Act (1998) and the Marine Life Protection Act (1999).

#### **Statement of prevailing science**

There is an international scientific consensus regarding the importance of both sound, ecosystem-based fisheries management and systems of marine protected areas as mutually compatible methods of safeguarding ocean habitats and biodiversity and ensuring sustainable harvest of marine species.

#### **Where we want to be**

The OPC's is committed to the effective implementation and adaptive management of both improved fisheries management and the statewide network of marine protected areas as important steps toward recovery and protection of California's marine ecosystems. The OPC will also work to help implement ocean related recommendations that come out of the California Fish and Wildlife Strategic Vision process.