

RECREATIONAL ABALONE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINTUES

NOVEMBER 5, 2016

1. 10:30 – 10:45 **Introductions and announcements (Taniguchi)**

1.1 New RAAC LED representatives – Nancy and Josh

1.2 Members: Ian Taniguchi (DFW science advisor/chair), Dennis Haussler (central), Brooke Halsey (north), Chris Voss (south), Doug Laughlin (central), Nancy Caruso (south), Joel Hendricks (DFW enforcement). Josh Russo (north); absent: Pete Haaker (science advisor).

1.3 Discussion: Standing rules apply and discussion of agenda items limited to Committee. Public comment is provided at the end. Secretary only speaks when needed. There may be a need to open up discussion to everyone on some agenda items during the meeting.

1.4 Cynthia Catton: Cynthia shared news that Laura Rogers-Bennett was inducted into the Women Diver's Hall of Fame.

2. 10:45 – 11:30 **CDFW enforcement report 2015-2016 activities (Hendricks):**

2.1 Current year (2016/17) budget update: A print out was provided for all attendees. Abalone enforcement continues to be a big priority. Approximately \$37,678 was allotted for abalone enforcement to LED, an additional \$25,000 from MPLA funds were allotted to LED for OT. These funds provided additional support during saturation patrols which occur during low tides.

2.2 Current fishery assessments and statistics: Currently 90-96% of the take occurs in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Trends show increase in the sport for people out of the area. There were no new changes to abalone regulations in 2016. This was the sixth year of the Department's Automated License Data System (ALDS), and all cards issued in 2016 were issued through ALDS. ALDS has curtailed the number of people purchasing additional ab cards, in the past there was a huge request for additional ab cards; however the Department has seen a large decline in duplicate cards. The MPAs throughout the north coast have caused a shift in where people fish, people are now seeking other areas along the coast, including remote destinations. Rock picking has increased this year after seeing a decrease in past years after the change to the 8:00 am start time in 2014. The timing of low tides after 8:00 am this year was the key factor in the increase and created staffing challenges for LED to cover the tides. Citations in 2016 do vary, but the most common violations are:

1. failing to complete tags and abalone cards
2. over limits

3. unlawful possession

2.2 Court rulings and cases for more serious crimes: A description of several major crimes in 2016 was provided. Most cases are currently awaiting trial and some have been completed. The more serious cases result in large fines, such as \$65,000 or more, loss of license, and sometimes jail.

2.3 Enforcement statistics: See attached LED enforcement report letter for details.

2.4 Funding and Needs: Funding continues to be a critical piece of abalone enforcement efforts. Wildlife officers continue to rely on the public to advise them of any issues, LED is working hard to establish and maintain relationships with the public by conducting outreach and provided easier ways to report observations or violations to CalTip, for example, the public can text in addition to calling.

2.5 Conclusion: The closing of take south of San Francisco has shifted harvesting pressure to the north coast; therefore Abalone is still a top priority for LED. Abalone continues to be sold on the black market, and as long as this is the case LED will spend a majority of their time focusing on over harvesting and poaching. The Department is committed to protecting natural resources and keeping the coast a place for all people to enjoy natural resources.

2.6 Discussion: RAAC members and members of the public discussed ways to reduce poaching, increase education and outreach, and how violation fines are collected and where they go.

3. 11:30 – 12: **Budget 2016/17 and abalone dedicated account update** (Taniguchi)

3.1 Ian presented the annual budget (2016-17) for the abalone project. The allotted budget is \$535,000; current projected totals are \$520,051. See attached Budget handout for specific details of fund expenditures.

The overall decline of the fishery has had negative impacts on budgets and funding. As the number of divers fishing for abalone declines, funding sources will also decline. It is important to sustain funding so the Department does not operate in the red; while there is a reserve it is close to being depleted.

3.2 Discussion and public comments: Sonke and other RAAC members explained the breakdown of funds between science and enforcement, and the challenges of increasing future funding. The RAAC and the public discussed steps the public can take to increase support and funding for LED. At 12:15 a motion was made and passed for the RAAC to recommend to the DFW Director to allot 100 hours per warden for abalone enforcement for Sonoma and Mendocino counties, which is where most of the take and violations occur. Sonke recommended that members of the public submit letters expressing concern for insufficient funds for LED to both the Director and the Commission.

12:15 – 13:00 **Lunch**

4. 13:00 – 14:30 **Proposed Emergency Rulemaking for the 2017 red abalone fishery**

4.1 Recent survey results and need for rulemaking: Laura Rogers-Bennett presented an update on abalone catch density and reproduction data on the north coast. As of October 2016 1/3 of abalone fishers catch 9 or more abalone in a season and 2/3 of abalone fishers catch less than 9 abalone in a season. Current overall densities are 0.44, and deep water refuge densities are 0.20. The Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP) has a set trigger for regulatory action if densities fall below 0.25 in deep water refuge. This trigger causes management action to reduce the Total Allowable Catch by 25% to ensure the sustainability of the fishery. Laura explained how the cruise surveys are conducted and included a detailed explanation of how abalone recruitment is assessed through boulders sampling and plankton tows to sample newly settled abalone and the planktonic larvae. Abalone productivity has decreased over the past year. Laura encouraged the public and the RAAC members to review publications and information on the fishery on the Department's website. It was also suggested that the public participate in fishery management by volunteering to assist DFW on surveys.

4.2 Environmental factors causing the concern for action: Cynthia Catton's presentation on kelp loss and the Perfect Storm was delivered by Laura Rogers-Bennett. Warm sea surface temperatures, poor food availability, low kelp and increases in competition (purple sea urchins) have all caused a decline in kelp. As of 2014 data show a 93% loss of kelp; however there was continued loss in 2015 and decreased growth in 2016. Annual aerial kelp fly-over survey data show a dramatic decline in surface kelp abundance from 2008 to 2014 at four abalone index sites. Pictures of this decline were presented. The decline in kelp density means there is little food for abalone and they appear to be starving over past few years. To account for this theory, a recent tissue analysis by Jim Moore determined shrunken abalone do not have withering syndrome; instead there was evidence of starvation.

Data show the density of purple sea urchin is 60 times the normal density, this number has increased since 2014. Photos in the presentation showed differences in kelp health and densities over the years. Management is working to form partnerships with people in the sea urchin industry to conduct small scale urchin removals to monitor the recovery of kelp. The poor environmental conditions have created increased natural mortality, significant impacts to reproduction, and the prediction of ongoing starvation conditions for abalone. These biological impacts along with the continued decline in densities at fishery index sites have led CDFW to make recommendations for emergency action.

4.3 Discussion of rulemaking options (includes public expression on this topic): Sonke presented on the upcoming emergency rule makings that will be recommended by the Department to the Commission at the MRC meeting on November 15, 2016, these recommendations are based on the ARMP's guidelines for significant declines in abalone densities. Although the emergency rulemaking process only requires a five day notice to

the public of any impending emergency rulemaking, the Department wanted to present this information today to involve the RAAC and the public as early as possible. Josh Russo has offered an additional meeting on December 3, 2016 with the Watermens Alliance in Fort Bragg, details to come.

A red abalone fishery timeline of events was presented to explain the cause for emergency action this year. The current total allowable catch (TAC) is 190,000 abalone per year. The proposed new TAC stemming from the ARMP triggers that were reached 2016, is 107,000 abalone per year.

The Department is recommending two rulemaking options under the emergency rulemaking.

Option 1:

- Reduction in annual catch to 9
- Close November

Option 2:

- Reduction in annual catch to 9
- Close November and April

4.4 Discussion: The RAAC and the public discussed the emergency recommendations that will be presented to the Commission on November 15, 2016. It was recommended that the public attend the December 3, 2016 Watermens Alliance meeting in Fort Bragg to make suggestions and further the discussion. The RAAC agreed to hold a teleconference meeting prior to the December Fish and Game Commission meeting to further discuss the emergency rulemaking and to make a recommendation for the director to provide to the FGC.

14:30-14:45 Break

An official break was not taken due to time constraints; however, attendees could take breaks as needed while the meeting continued.

5. 14:45 – 13:00 **Other Business**

5.1 Abalone Working Group (AWG) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC): The mission statement and history of AWG/TNC was presented. The purpose of AWG/TNC is to provide a more robust set of data to use in developing the FMP. In addition to AWG, TNC is also working with and supporting Reef Check California to develop science protocols and collect abalone size data. AWG/TNC is in the process of developing an app for collecting abalone catch size data. It is critical that AWG/TNC work with fishers and the public on collecting and analyzing abalone size data.

The current collaborative group meets monthly and is always in need of other fishers to participate in the group. Data collection when conducted by citizens versus professional scientists is more cost effective than transect surveys conducted only by CDFW.

Ultimately what the AWG is working towards is for fishermen to be more involved in the decision making and management of their fishery.

The RAAC is in a position to help further this goal of fishermen being more active in the decision making process. The RAAC could serve as a venue for fishermen to be directly involved with the development of the FMP right now. A suggestion of how the RAAC can help in this process was provided, including a recommendation to create a smaller sub-committee led by the RAAC to elevate the involvement of the public in the development of the FMP.

5.2 Discussion of the AWG/TNC presentation: RAAC members and members of the public provided comments and questions regarding what next steps should be taken for utilizing AWG/TNC for data collection and processing. A suggestion was made to all public and RAAC members to actively participate in abalone fishery management. RAAC requested that they are given more opportunity to be involved in the details of the FMP.

5.3. A recommendation was made to have a teleconference prior to the Commission Meeting in December 2016. A phone call will allow for the Department, RAAC members and fishers, both local and nonlocal, to participate in the discussion of both the FMP and the emergency rule makings that will be suggested to the Commission in December. Ian stated that the RAAC will work on scheduling the teleconference and details of the call will be released soon.

6. 14:45 – 15:15 **Public Expression (please limit to 3 minutes per person)**

7. 15:15 – 15:30 **Wrap up, next meeting and Adjournment**

7.1 The next RAAC meeting will be scheduled for March 11. A venue and details to follow will be announced in the coming weeks.