

# California Fish and Game Commission Coastal Fishing Communities Project

## DRAFT Analysis of Staff Recommendation 8

“Survey communities, commercial and recreational fishers, and processors about their priorities for Commission focus.”

*March 8, 2021 DRAFT*

### Background

In 2019, the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) Marine Resources Committee (MRC) received a final [Staff Synthesis Report on Coastal Fishing Communities Meetings, 2016-2018](#), which included a list of ten staff-recommended options for potential Commission action in response to input received during the meetings. The staff recommendations were advanced as initial concepts, which MRC directed staff to more fully develop and evaluate to help guide the Commission in determining which, if any, to pursue in support of coastal fishing community needs. Each staff recommendation (SR) is being evaluated using a [draft standardized analytical approach](#) that was presented to MRC in July 2020, and which focuses evaluation around four categories: I. *Basic informational needs*; II. *Current regulatory and policy context*; III. *Potential Commission role*; and IV. *Costs and benefits*.

### Overview of Staff Recommendation 8

This evaluation is for SR 8, to “survey communities, commercial and recreational fishers, and processors about their priorities for Commission focus.” As contextualized in the 2019 staff synthesis report, this strategy could help refine understanding about the issues facing coastal fishing communities and priorities from their perspectives. Some stakeholders have criticized this idea as being too similar to the coastal fishing communities public meetings held in 2016-2018.

#### I. Basic Informational Needs

The first informational need for this recommendation is to understand options for how to survey community members. This evaluation focuses on a formalized survey with standardized questions, informed by how to design an effective survey for this audience. Consultation with an organization that has expertise in survey design and format would be necessary.

The Commission has had limited experience surveying stakeholders. In 2019, with feedback and guidance from California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) outreach experts, the Commission designed and conducted an online public survey regarding development of an updated strategic plan and input on Commission priorities. The online survey was combined with one-on-one interviews with select participants to dig more deeply into perspectives they represented. Similarly, in early 2013, the Commission conducted a survey of its stakeholders regarding updates to its website. In both cases, approximately three dozen individuals provided feedback via the online surveys that was helpful in advancing the projects.

A survey would be both a qualitative and a quantitative interest, depending on the questions the Commission wishes to answer and how the survey is designed. Numerical data could be statistically analyzed and may be useful for developing a baseline of knowledge or addressing certain concerns. Quantitative responses would also be informative, especially in comparison

to the initial information on community needs garnered from the coastal fishing community meetings held in 2016-2018.

The most recent work surveying fishing communities was during the 2016-2018 meetings, and through public comments solicited on the staff synthesis report findings and recommendations for potential Commission action. Some of the primary concerns and priorities highlighted by fishing community members during those meetings have been accounted for and addressed through other recommendations, notably concerns about the constraints of restricted access to adapting fishing (SR 2), the ability to respond to and engage in emerging fisheries (SR 3), and adaptable fishing permitting structures (SR 6). This recommendation is also tied to SR 10 (continue to develop an understanding of climate change impacts on fisheries and fishing communities) as surveying communities would assist in building a better understanding of their needs in response to climate change.

A survey could be either a short-term or a long-term effort, depending on how the Commission wishes to pursue it. A one-time survey may be more feasible as a short-term effort, but a recurring survey as a long-term tool might provide more in-depth data, which could better identify trends and needs over time.

There has been work by external agencies relevant to this recommendation. Some of the work has been active surveying, and some has been in support of outreaching, including surveying community members. At the state level, the California Natural Resources Agency's 2018 [Safeguarding California](#) report contains several next steps relevant to state-managed fisheries, including outreach to marine resource users. Staff at the state and regional water quality control boards have compiled a variety of shore-based subsistence angler fishing surveys conducted by several agencies over the past 20 years; while a report is not available at this time, Commission staff have been given access to the data. It would be worthwhile to reach out to other agencies with similar priorities to share information about any recent outreach survey work. Potential agencies to discuss surveys with are the California Ocean Protection Council, California Coastal Commission, and California Coastal Conservancy.

In the state but outside of government agency work, Humboldt State University researchers, Ecotrust, and Strategic Earth Consulting are currently conducting a study to assess port community well-being and socioeconomic conditions. The study will include outreach and surveying to collect qualitative data from fishing community leaders.

In the federal sphere, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) has conducted directly-relevant outreach work related to its Climate and Communities Initiative. A January 2020 workshop developed in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy, Oregon, detailed a set of climate scenarios and potential fishery impacts. From mid-December 2020 to early February 2021, PFMC conducted four [regionally-focused online workshops](#) (<https://www.pcouncil.org/climate-change-scenario-planning-series-of-online-workshops-various-dates-december-2020-through-february-2021/>) to explore the potential fishery impacts under each climate change scenario developed in 2020 and to identify potential actions that PFMC and other stakeholders could take in response. The results, reported at the March 2021 PFMC meeting, are likely to provide a wealth of information that may satisfy portions of the inquiries intended by this staff recommendation (see PFMC meeting Agenda Item I.1, <https://www.pcouncil.org/march-2021-briefing-book/#1>).

## **II. Current Regulatory and Policy Context**

Current policies, regulatory structures, and management plans are unlikely to affect or constrain this particular recommendation, as it is intended to be an outreach and information-gathering effort. This effort will likely inform the Commission of constraints and effects from existing structures, depending on the extent and depth of feedback received from community members.

Relevant to this project, the 2016-2018 statewide coastal fishing community meetings were a first step in what this recommendation suggests; this recommendation could be considered an extension of those initial efforts. It may be useful to note that the Commission's justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) work plan also calls for a survey of stakeholders, so it may be possible to synergize survey design or implementation consultation efforts. Furthermore, extending the survey efforts to a broader range of stakeholders may complement the Commission's current JEDI initiative.

## **III. Potential Commission Role**

The Commission can choose to direct its staff to undertake information-gathering efforts. This could be an effort exclusively conducted by Commission staff and is therefore directly within the Commission's jurisdiction. Alternatively, if the Commission wishes, this is a recommendation that could be explored for opportunities to work with sister agencies and other potential partners to help design and distribute materials or conduct virtual and online surveys. For example, the Department or the California Ocean Protection Council may have an interest in the information that could be gathered in such surveys; their efforts may also allow efforts to reach a broader range of stakeholders. Additionally, the Department has experience conducting surveys and is likely to have prior expertise or lessons learned that may be useful in this effort.

## **IV. Costs and Benefits**

### *Adaptability*

An information-gathering effort such as this would not have a direct impact on the Commission's ability to support adaptive management measures; however, it would keep the Commission better informed about management needs, which potentially could then be addressed with adaptive solutions. This recommendation is one method by which coastal fishing communities can make the Commission aware of management options they would like to have available to them, allowing the Commission to investigate its ability to act on those options.

### *Consistency*

An information-gathering effort would not directly lead to changes in management structures. However, it may make the Commission aware of concerns with current management structures and adjustments that could be made that may lead to long-term change. This recommendation is also consistent with existing Commission policies and previous Commission actions, and could be considered an extension of previous outreach efforts. While the recommendation reflects a consistency in effort and an expansion to this project that

stakeholders may appreciate, it could also be perceived as never-ending gathering of information without action.

### *Accessibility*

Similar to adaptability, this recommendation does not in itself affect accessibility. However, the results of this effort may make the Commission aware of ways in which accessibility could be improved, and areas in which stakeholders might wish to see access increased. The potential effect to fisheries, species, or communities is not predictable and will depend on responses received from community members.

### *Manageability*

In terms of management burden, this recommendation is unlikely to have a direct effect on the Department, except that the Commission may seek the Department's consultation in outreach effort and survey design and implementation. Depending on the feedback received from coastal fishing communities, changes resulting from what the Commission learns may increase management burden long-term. This recommendation in itself will not introduce or change any management structures that will cause concern with sister agencies or other partners, though the feedback received may lead to proposals for change.

### *Affordability*

This recommendation would require considerable Commission staff time investment. Whether this action ultimately includes a virtual survey, or active visits to communities to discuss concerns with community members, outreach design, distribution, analysis, and so forth would all require staff time. Any effort would likely fall to staff who regularly work in support of marine items. For this recommendation to be feasible on a large scale in the near-term, additional resources would likely be necessary.

This recommendation would not necessarily require a great deal of investment from the Department, though its assistance would be invaluable in a number of ways. In general, investment from sister agencies and partners could be extremely valuable and desirable for this recommendation. The Commission should seek input from sister agencies and partner organizations with experience in this kind of effort in order to capture the information and feedback that will be most useful collectively. The Commission may also wish to engage sister agencies and partners in reaching a broader audience, consistent with the Commission's current JEDI initiative. Staff have re-engaged with some invested stakeholders on the fishing communities project, and the Commission may wish to explore interest and potential further engagement with them on this recommendation.

In addition to staff time investment, the budget for this recommendation would ideally include hiring a consultant for outreach and/or survey design, implementation, and analysis, which would clearly require funding. Furthermore, if the Commission wishes to reach a broader stakeholder audience, this project would benefit from consultation with outdoors organizations that focus on non-traditional participants. These considerations add up to what could be a substantial budget. If the Commission chooses to avoid more substantial costs and not pursue a significant breadth of survey work, this recommendation would likely be repetitious of the 2016-2018 survey effort.

Depending on the type of surveying conducted and the breadth of outreach desired, the timeline for this recommendation will be variable. Similar to the initial statewide meetings, this recommendation could take up to two years to be conducted with maximal depth and breadth. If staff are directed to undertake this recommendation at a less intensive level and an increased budget is not allocated, the timeline could be extended due to the already considerable staff workload, and likely with limited benefit beyond what was captured through the 2016-2018 effort.

### *Resilience*

Similar to adaptability and accessibility, this recommendation would not have a direct effect on resilience itself. Ideally, this effort would allow communities to voice concerns about adaptability and socioeconomic resilience and allow staff to explore and discuss options for building resilience with community members. It would assist in making the Commission aware of community economic concerns and how communities see themselves improving their economic prospects. While this particular recommendation might not promote ecologically resilient fisheries on its face, resilience requires adaptation and balance, and this recommendation would inform the Commission of how and where adaptation is desired and needed.