

Ocean Resources Enhancement and Hatchery Program Ocean Resources Enhancement Advisory Panel Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 30, 2024
Time: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (PST)

Location: 3020 Old Ranch Parkway, Suite 160, Seal Beach, CA 90740, and Microsoft TEAMS Video Conference

Attendees:

Ocean Resources Enhancement Advisory Panel (OREAP) members and alternate members: John Ballotti, Myles Blatt, Sandra Estep, Luke Gardner, Wayne Kotow, Merit McCrea, John Riordan, Michael Quill, Dave Rudie, Rob Ross, and Tony Vaught.

Ocean Resources Enhancement and Hatchery Program (OREHP) Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC): Tanya Darden, Ph.D. and Kai Lorenzen, Ph.D.

Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI): Mark Drawbridge, Mariana Kawakami, and Ruairi MacNamara.

California Sea Grant (CASG) and University of Florida: Theresa Talley, Susana Hervas-Avila, and Ashley Palinkas.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): Bryan Barney, Kathryn Johnson, Kirsten Ramey (OREAP member), Jeff Rodzen, James Steffey, and Valerie Taylor.

Members of the Public: Katie Cieri

1. Introductions and announcements

- Introductions from all attendees, both in-person and online.

2. Receive presentation on the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

- Valerie Taylor provided a brief overview of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, emphasizing the prohibition of serial communications among members outside of public meetings to ensure open discussions. A copy of the presentation can be requested by e-mailing the OREHP Coordinator at OREHP@wildlife.ca.gov.

3. Receive OREHP Bylaws and potentially vote for chair and vice-chair

- OREHP Bylaws were sent out to all members and alternates prior to the meeting. There were no requests to amend Bylaws.
- Valerie Taylor called for nominations for OREAP chair. Wayne Kotow nominated John Ballotti. Merit McCrea seconded. John Ballotti accepted nomination. Valerie Taylor called for vote. Vote was unanimous – John Ballotti elected as OREAP chair.
- Valerie Taylor called for nominations for OREAP vice-chair. John Ballotti nominated Wayne Kotow. Merit McCrea seconded. Wayne Kotow accepted nomination. Valerie Taylor called for vote. Vote is unanimous – Wayne Kotow elected as OREAP vice-chair.
- John Ballotti called for a budget subcommittee to be created to ensure financial oversight of the OREHP and to have a dedicated group to address budgetary concerns over the next three years.
 - Wayne Kotow, Tony Vaught, and Kirsten Ramey volunteered to be on the budget subcommittee. John Ballotti to attend subcommittee meetings as observer.

4. Receive presentation from California Sea Grant on the results of the OREHP Stakeholder Engagement Visioning Process

- CASG and the University of Florida provided the results of their “Developing a vision, criteria and options for the future of OREHP: A collaborative planning process” study. A copy of the presentation can be requested by e-mailing the OREHP Coordinator at OREHP@wildlife.ca.gov.
- Questions and Comments:
 - Tony Vaught asked what percent responded to the survey and if CDFW provided contacts for the aquaculture industry.
 - Approximately, seven percent responded and completed the online survey.
 - Aquaculture industry representatives were included in the focus group; aquaculture considered “research” within the report.
 - Merit McCrea asked about the response rate for commercial and [Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel] CPFV participants, and about the public’s willingness to pay for the Program and how does that shed light on how much people value the Program.
 - Commercial and CPFV response rates were 11%; recreational response rate was 6.2%.
 - Survey findings show that majority of respondents would pay more for the Program, even without noticeable changes to the white seabass population. This indicates that anglers value the Program for a broad suite of reasons not primarily related to population or fishery enhancement outcomes.
 - Kai Lorenzen emphasized the need to balance aquaculture focus with broader stewardship goals, considering natural populations and fisheries.

- Sandra Estep noted that recreational fishermen do not know what the [Ocean Enhancement] Stamp is for.
- Wayne Kotow stated that there needs to be realistic goals and objectives for the Program that we can measure to be able to show progress or success, if not some failures.
- Wayne Kotow requested that the Evaluation report and CASG presentations from previous meetings be sent to OREAP members and alternates.
- Michael Quill expressed concern about transparency and the need for clear communication to alleviate public suspicions about the Program.

5. Receive hatchery and growout operations update from Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute.

- Mark Drawbridge provided an update on hatchery operations (broodstock management, production status, and releases), current research, field sampling and tag returns, and the Seabass in the Classroom (SITC) Program. A copy of the presentation can be requested by e-mailing the OREHP Coordinator at OREHP@wildlife.ca.gov.
- Questions and Comments:
 - Merit McCrea asked about the differences in growth rates (average weight) at time of release.
 - There are several variables (location, depth of growout pen, how long held in the growout pen) that contribute to the difference in growth rate.
 - Bryan Barney asked if the brood fish are only breeding within tanks or if the hatchery is making crosses between tanks.
 - Yes, they are usually breeding only within the tanks. Occasionally, the brood fish get moved around between tanks.
 - Jeff Rozden highlighted the increasing contribution of hatchery-produced fish to the wild population, stressing the need to manage genetics and diversity in hatchery broodstock.

6. Receive update on the CDFW white seabass genetics study

- Bryan Barney provided a brief overview of the progress that CDFW has made on the white seabass genetics study, which aims to better understand hatchery contributions to wild white seabass populations. A copy of the presentation can be requested by e-mailing the OREHP Coordinator at OREHP@wildlife.ca.gov.
- CDFW has contracted Dr. Mark Christie from Purdue University to provide modeling support for the genetics study at a cost of \$10,000. Valerie Taylor to provide a copy of contract to the OREAP Budget Subcommittee.
- Questions and Comments
 - John Ballotti asked if the project is on schedule to be completed by August

2025 and if CDFW be providing updates throughout the process.

- Project is currently on track to be completed by August 2025 and progress reports will be given at future meetings, if needed.

7. Discuss OREHP FY 2024/25 budget and potential research projects that can be used to measure success of the program

- The budget increase request of \$5.2 million over 4 fiscal years (\$1.3 million per fiscal year) was approved, primarily funding the HSWRI hatchery contract. Remaining funds will support various research proposals from the SAC.
- Discussion on genetic sampling of white seabass
 - The S-K project is collecting genetic samples, with 150 fin clips collected this summer for analysis. CDFW also collecting fin clips.
 - Efforts are underway to involve more recreational anglers in sample collection. Fin Clip Kits are available upon request from CDFW and HSWRI.
 - Wayne Kotow and John Ballotti requested guidance from the SAC on geography and sample sizes necessary for accurate statistical analysis of the current genetic studies.

8. Public comment on agenda items and closing of meeting

- No comments received from public.
- Meeting adjourned at 1:09 p.m.