

Committee Staff Summary for March 13, 2025

3B. Marine Aquaculture: Status of Existing Leases**Today's Item**Information Action

Receive Department and Commission staff update on existing state water bottom leases and pending requests under review.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)**Background**

The Commission is the lessor of 17 active state water bottom leases issued for the purpose of marine shellfish and seaweed aquaculture. Leased areas are located in Tomales Bay, Morro Bay, and off the Santa Barbara County coast. Close coordination and problem-solving is required between staff and the Department, the latter supporting administration of leases and associated natural resource management where leased areas are located. In recent years, the Department and/or staff have provided an annual update on leases and pending leaseholder requests currently under review.

Pending Lease Actions

Staff and the Department meet bi-weekly to review and advance pending lease action requests. Currently, there are 15 lease action requests: one to transfer lease assignment; four to expand, reconcile, and/or modify lease boundaries; six to authorize the culturing of additional species; one to add/reinstate previously-authorized culture methods; and three applications for new leases, one of which is on hold. The reviews require multiple successive steps and, while some delays have ensued for various reasons, staff continues to diligently pursue completing administrative actions that do not require Commission approval, and to provide recommendations for those that require Commission action. Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for each individual request, for which the lessee or applicant bears significant responsibility, continues to be one of the principle drivers of timeline and workload.

In addition to advancing the 15 requests, staff is actively engaged in administrative oversight and leaseholder communications, where appropriate, to ensure leaseholders are in compliance with individual leases. Collaborating Commission and Department staffs continue to forge improved internal communications, coordination, and processes.

Implementing the Enhanced Leasing Process

Following the Commission's approval in August 2023 of the enhanced lease application process, and the public interest criteria and determination framework, Commission and Department staffs have actively collaborated to translate these tools into actionable steps. Efforts have focused on strengthening interagency coordination through the new guidelines by fostering improved collaboration and communication among state and federal agencies of jurisdiction and with applicants.

Committee Staff Summary for March 13, 2025

Two Lease Applications

Throughout 2024 and early 2025, Commission and Department staffs progressed two state water bottom lease applications, from San Andreas Shellfish Company and Santa Barbara Sea Ranch, Inc. While both applications were received prior to development of the enhanced lease application process, they are being integrated into the process as appropriate and have included multiple staff-led steps, such as:

- Coordinating and facilitating interagency meetings with regional state and federal agency representatives;
- proactively meeting with applicants to develop and review next steps in the process;
- supporting the initial vetting of applications at Marine Resources Committee and Tribal Committee meetings (additional committee discussions will occur throughout the application process);
- reviewing public input; and
- initiating environmental review under CEQA and additional reviews necessary for a public interest evaluation.

Commission Grants Lease Assignment Request

In February 2025, the Commission approved Cove Mussel Co., LLC's request to assign the lease for State Water Bottom M-430-06, in Tomales Bay, to Starbird Mariculture Incorporated for the remaining two years of the lease. The approval included amended lease terms to address marine debris concerns related to aquaculture operations, review by agency partners, and review by Starbird Mariculture Incorporated. The lease amendment formalizing the assignment will be executed after the required financial surety agreement is in place (currently under development).

Today's Update

Today, the committee will receive a Department presentation covering state water bottom leases, pending lease actions, and implementing the enhanced leasing process. Looking ahead, staff and the Department will continue to advance pending lease actions and consider ways to improve efficiency in advancing pending and new requests, including through enhanced interagency coordination.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. [Department presentation \(to be posted separately\)](#)

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

Existing Leases and Pending Requests Under Review

Status Update

*Marine Resources Committee
California Fish and Game Commission
March 13, 2025*

Randy Lovell
State Aquaculture Coordinator
California Department of Fish and Wildlife



Existing State Water Bottom Leases

- 17 state water bottom leases
 - 15 in Tomales Bay and Morro Bay
 - 2 in ocean waters (Santa Barbara Channel)
- Approximately 900 acres of state-owned aquatic lands
- Operated by 11 commercial businesses



photos: Laura Gray

2024 Statewide Production (*state leases and local jurisdictions*)

- Oysters (*seed and market size*)
 - Pacific, Kumamoto, Eastern, European Flat, Olympia (native)
- Manila Clams (*seed and market size*)
- Mussels

<i>'singles' produced (2024)</i>	<u>All Oysters</u>	<u>Manila Clams</u>	<u>Mussels</u>
Tomales Bay	6,041,165	20,160	147,080
Morro Bay	426,792	9,180	0
Santa Barbara Channel	7,974	0	1,405,060
<i>State Leases:</i>	6,475,931	29,340	1,552,140
Humboldt Bay	8,195,122	<i>(seed: unreported)</i>	0
Total:	14,671,053	-	1,552,140

Successful seed production in Humboldt Bay

- 'high-health' location = approved for import by other states/provinces
- major seed source for North American west coast shellfish industry (~ \$100M value)
- offshore wind terminal in Humboldt Bay could potentially jeopardize biosecurity

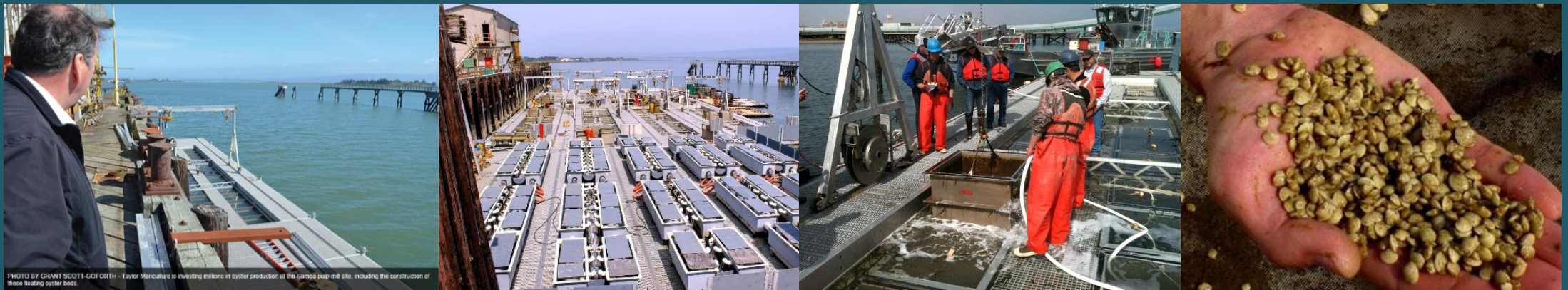


PHOTO BY GRANT SCOTT GOFORTH - Taylor Manufacturing is investing millions in oyster production at the Sisson pump mill site, including the construction of these floating oyster beds.

photo: CA Sea Grant / Humboldt State Now

New Lease Applications & Amendment Requests

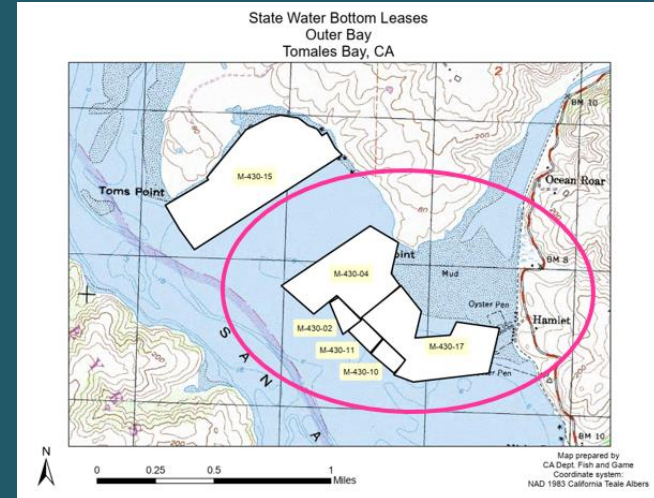
New Leases proposed (3)	2 active applicants addressing CEQA 1 dormant (per applicant)	
Species additions (6)	CEQA efforts and/or lease agreements execution	
Culture method changes (1)	administrative review	
Boundary reconciliations (5)	Tomales Bay (Walker Creek area) shared boundaries	coordinating growers and CDFW surveyor

Lease Boundary Reconciliations

Tomales Bay

- Marconi area completed
- Walker Creek area next

Walker Creek area



Plat

CDFW Aquaculture Program
State Water Bottoms for Aquaculture Leases
Tomales Bay
March 15, 2021

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

All that certain real property situate in the State Water Bottoms of Tomales Bay, County of Marin, State of California being all that portion of the following described water bottom area:

M-430-05

COMMENCING at metal rod in monument well, being a National Geodetic Survey monument stamped "X 1395 1987" and Permanent Identifier (PID) of JT9483, from which point a brass disk in boulder, also being a National Geodetic Survey monument stamped "Hans 1906" and Permanent Identifier (PID) of JT2551, bears North 34° 06' 08" West 7357.50 feet; thence from said Point of Commencement South 14° 55' 47" West 382.58 feet to the Point of Beginning;

THENCE FROM SAID POINT OF BEGINNING the following fourteen (14) courses:

- 1) South 40° 00' 00" East 650.00 feet;
- 2) South 17° 00' 00" West 1,875.00 feet;
- 3) South 25° 40' 37" East 804.08 feet;
- 4) South 49° 35' 00" West 190.27 feet;
- 5) North 40° 00' 00" West 6,810.86 feet;
- 6) North 09° 00' 00" West 756.03 feet;
- 7) North 74° 40' 00" East 1,189.23 feet;
- 8) South 01° 15' 00" East 725.00 feet;
- 9) South 60° 15' 00" West 725.00 feet;
- 10) South 36° 15' 00" East 950.00 feet;
- 11) South 59° 30' 00" East 1,500.00 feet;
- 12) South 40° 00' 00" East 475.00 feet;
- 13) North 69° 35' 00" East 950.00 feet;
- 14) South 59° 29' 00" East 975.00 feet to the POINT OF BEGINNING.

Containing 160.49 Acres, more or less.

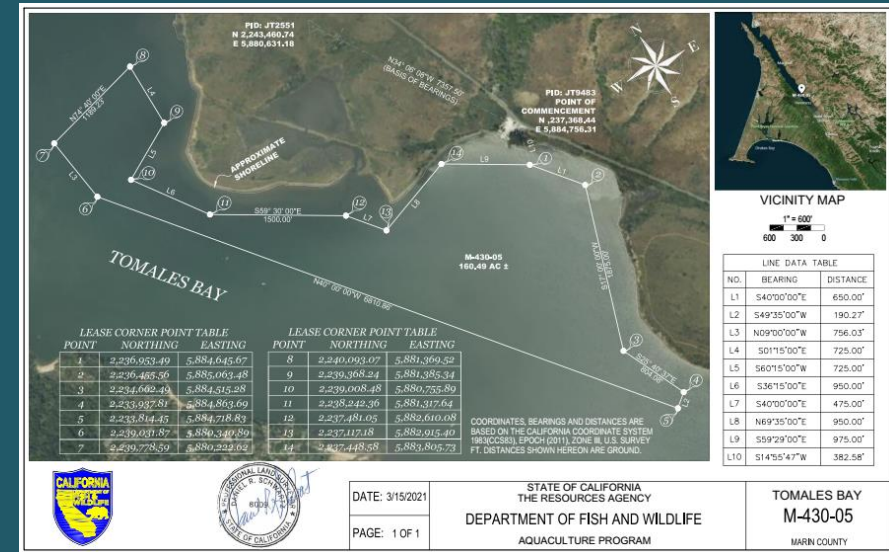
Coordinates and Bearings are based upon the California Coordinate System of 1983, CCS83, Zone 3, (2011). Distances shown hereon are ground distances. To approximate CCS83 grid distances multiply the distances by the combination factor 0.99995347.

End of Description

Exhibit attached hereto and by this reference made a part hereof.

Page 1 of 2

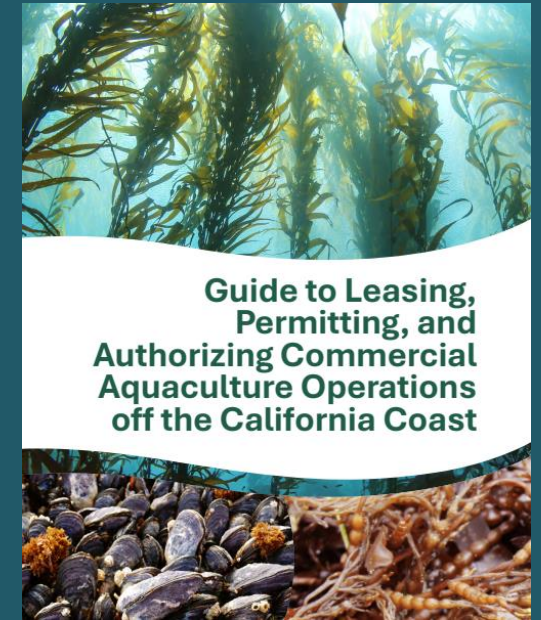
Legal Description



Exhibit

Achievements

- improved early coordination – all agencies (new leases, compliance)
- guide for marine aquaculture permitting (federal and state waters)
- grant proposal: marine debris removal (under review, NOAA)
 - includes removal of legacy gear at 2 sites (SB & Tomales)
 - financial surety review and reform
 - study of gear use & removal impacts
- lease assignment approved, (Cove – Starbird, Feb 2025)
 - financial surety and lease agreements forthcoming for execution



Additional Marine Aquaculture Projects & Policies

- Aquaculture Opportunity Area - programmatic environmental review & spatial planning
- Biosecurity at Humboldt Heavy Lift (Offshore Wind) Terminal – Aquaculture Disease Committee
- Proposed seaweed farm - federal waters within proposed AOA (Ocean Rainforest)
- Marine Aquaculture Action Plan – led by Ocean Protection Council
- Shellfish Best Management Practice Plans – desired outcomes / performance standards to be defined
- Wild Broodstock Collection – as applied to seaweeds
- Sustainable Aquaculture Program revenues and capacity needs

Thank You

Randy Lovell
State Aquaculture Coordinator
aquaculturecoord@wildlife.ca.gov

