

Committee Staff Summary for July 16-17, 2025 MRC

7. Staff and Agency Updates**Today's Item****Information** ☒**Action** ☐

Receive updates from staff and other agencies, including the California Ocean Protection Council and the Department.

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

This is a standing agenda item for staff and agencies to provide an update on marine-related activities. Members of the public will have an opportunity to share thoughts and questions, although the level of in-meeting discussion will be at the discretion of the MRC co-chairs.

(A) Department**I. Law Enforcement Division (LED)**

LED will provide an update on topics of interest to MRC.

II. Marine Region

Marine Region is not expected to provide an update at today's meeting.

III. Office of the Aquaculture Coordinator**(a) Best Management Practices Plans (BMP plans) for Shellfish and Seaweed Culture on State Aquaculture Leases**

The impetus for developing shellfish and seaweed BMP plans for state water bottom leases issued by the Commission originated from community members who raised concerns about the trash and plastic pollution produced by aquaculture leaseholders in Tomales Bay. Discussions to develop a requirement for lease-specific BMP plans occurred between 2015 through 2018 via regional stakeholder meetings and MRC discussions. The last MRC agenda discussion was held in March 2019 (see staff summary in Exhibit 1 for background); at that meeting, MRC recommended to re-assess the project timeline at a future meeting. In July 2020, the BMP plans project was formally put on hold to prioritize management of existing leases and other state aquaculture initiatives.

At the March 2025 MRC meeting, the aquaculture coordinator highlighted the potential to resume efforts on BMP plans, and MRC requested they come back to MRC with a timeline for reinvigorating this effort.

Update

Staffing prioritization and BMPs development: Following the March MRC meeting, Department and Commission staff discussed the potential of resuming development of aquaculture BMP plan requirements. They concluded

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resumption would not be feasible without redirecting staff from existing commitments, particularly progress on pending aquaculture lease requests and supporting other state initiatives to improve aquaculture oversight. Therefore, staff and the Department will maintain their current focus on established priorities, unless the Commission chooses to reprioritize staff efforts.

Alternative approaches to BMPs and potential grant support: While a formal BMP plans project is on hold, the spirit of aquaculture farm BMPs is being addressed through alternative methods. Commission and Department staff have been working closely with other agencies, including the California Coastal Commission, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and California Ocean Protection Council. Together, they are tackling marine debris concerns through permit conditions, such as updated coastal development permits, and encouraging growers to voluntarily follow BMPs for their lease area(s).

The Department has also applied for a grant through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Removal Program. If awarded, the funding could provide the additional capacity needed to develop BMP plans without diverting staff from current, critical tasks. However, the Department has not received any official updates on the status of the application since submitting it in January.

(B) ***California Ocean Protection Council (OPC)***

OPC staff will provide a verbal update on topics of interest to the Commission. This will include an update on the development of a [California Aquaculture Action Plan](#), as requested by MRC in March.

(C) ***Commission Staff***

I. ***Commission Coastal Fishing Communities (CFC) Policy – Implementation***

CFC Policy StoryMap now posted online: The CFC Policy StoryMap — a user-friendly, GIS- and web-based tool — was developed by the Commission's 2024 California Sea Grant state fellow to serve as an easy-to-follow, visually-engaging guide to the CFC policy and its strategies and development, and to invite fishing community members and partners to engage in its implementation. The [CFC Policy StoryMap](#) can be viewed through the Commission website [home page](#) and its [Coastal Fishing Communities Project webpage](#). Fishing communities may utilize the tool to enhance their capacity to engage with decision-makers and ensure their voices are heard.

Continuing engagement: Staff remains committed to actively engaging with fishing community members, organizations, and partners. These one-on-one conversations explore implementation of the CFC policy and identify opportunities for collaborative support. Since February, the Commission's California Sea Grant state fellow, Caroline Newell, has led these efforts and is currently exploring ways to advance the CFC policy strategies.

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II. *CFC Spotlight*

MRC meetings provide a regular opportunity to highlight topics of importance or relevance to coastal fishing communities. These topics are sometimes brought forward by fishing organization representatives or fishermen attending the meetings, while others are based on external initiatives that staff or partners highlight for MRC. For example, in March 2025, a graduate student presented on the potential impacts of offshore wind on fishing communities—a topic she researched as a Commission intern—followed by insights from the commercial fishermen present at the meeting.

For today's meeting, Commission staff explored opportunities alongside other partners, agencies and community organizations that align with shared CFC interests. A prime example of this proactive engagement is outreach from Melissa Mahoney, Executive Director of the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust (MBFT). Melissa connected with Commission staff to explore how MBFT's initiatives could align with the Commission's CFC policy goals.

At staff's invitation, Melissa will join today's meeting to share insights into MBFT's work and its efforts to promote a sustainable and resilient fishing community in Monterey. Her presentation will also reflect on how some community needs have evolved since the [Commission-hosted Monterey fishing communities meeting in 2017](#), and offer perspectives on how the state can further support coastal fishing communities, particularly those directly on the waterfront. This presentation directly supports the CFC policy's [strategy A: "proactive community engagement."](#) by spotlighting key fishing community-focused work happening in California.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 9, March 2019 MRC meeting](#), related to aquaculture BMPs (*for background purposes only*)

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

COMMITTEE STAFF SUMMARY FOR MARCH 20, 2019*For background purposes only***9. Shellfish Aquaculture best management practices****Today's Item**Information ☐Direction ☒

Receive DFW update on progress developing a proposed regulation to require best management practices (BMPs) plans for state water bottom leases issued by FGC for purposes of aquaculture.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

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| • FGC discussed possible BMPs | Feb 10-11, 2016; Sacramento |
| • FGC supported BMPs rulemaking approach | Jun 22-23, 2016; Bakersfield |
| • MRC discussed aquaculture debris | Jul 21, 2016; MRC, Petaluma |
| • MRC update on BMPs development | Jul 20, 2017; MRC, Santa Rosa |
| • MRC update on management activities | Mar 6, 2018; MRC, Santa Rosa |
| • Draft BMP categories presented to MRC | Jul 17, 2018; MRC, San Clemente |
| • Draft BMP requirements presented to MRC | Nov 14, 2018; MRC, Sacramento |
| • Today's update | Mar 20, 2019; MRC, Sacramento |

Background

With the exception of Humboldt and San Diego bays, FGC has the authority to lease state water bottoms to any person for the purpose of conducting aquaculture in marine waters of the State, under terms agreed upon between FGC and the lessee (sections 15400 and 15405, California Fish and Game Code).

In 2016, FGC approved a staff recommendation to enhance lease stewardship through a regulation that specifies objectives that must be addressed by each lease holder in lease-specific shellfish aquaculture BMPs plans, and referred the topic to MRC (see Exhibit 1 for background).

Actions to date have included:

- Regular discussions at MRC meetings;
- MRC and FGC support of draft BMP categories developed by staff based on input at regional public meetings, and direction to develop proposed requirements (Exhibit 2);
- Draft proposed requirements for BMP categories developed by DFW and FGC staff (Exhibit 2), and public feedback on the draft proposed requirements gained through an Oct 2018 public meeting in Santa Rosa and written comments (Exhibit 3);
- MRC recommendation in Nov 2018, and FGC approval in Dec 2018, for staff to “revise the draft proposed requirements based on the public comments received; provide an opportunity for public review of the revised draft proposed requirements; and schedule the topic for MRC review and possible recommendation in Mar 2019.

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Following the last MRC meeting, staff began refining the draft BMP proposal; however, completing a revised draft proposal has been delayed due to multiple staff limitations and redirection of staff time toward completing a new legislative mandate. In particular, FGC staff medical leave and acting assignments created gaps, and both FGC and DFW staff have been re-directed to complete a legislatively-mandated, service-based budgeting process. The budgeting exercise includes documenting staffing and capacity needs for every service provided by DFW and FGC throughout the entire state, including aquaculture (over 3,500 service items have been identified). Following documentation of aquaculture services and associated staff time to provide those services, DFW and FGC leadership will meet to discuss strategies for completing the BMP project.

Today, DFW project lead Randy Lovell will provide any further updates.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation**

Temporarily place development of the BMPs plans regulation on hold and reassess the development timeline during the Jul 2019 MRC meeting.

Exhibits

1. Staff summaries from Jul 20, 2017 and Jul 17, 2018 MRC meetings (for background purposes)
2. *Proposed Requirements for Shellfish Aquaculture Lease Best Management Practices (BMP) Plans Regulation*, dated Oct 24, 2018
3. Staff summary from Nov 14, 2018 MRC meeting (for background purposes)

Committee Direction/Recommendation

MRC recommends that the timeline for developing an aquaculture BMPs plans regulation be reassessed at the Jul 2019 MRC meeting.