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Written Update to the Marine Resources Committee

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Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan

Over the past year, the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) has convened the Statewide Aquaculture Leadership Team, made up of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the Fish and Game Commission (FGC), the Coastal Commission, the State Lands Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, the State Water Resources Control Board, the California Department of Public Health, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture, to collaboratively develop streamlined draft Aquaculture Action Plan (Plan). The Leadership Team has developed a streamlined Plan to increase coordination among state agencies and improve consistency, transparency, and efficiency in planning, facilitating, permitting, managing, and fostering sustainable marine aquaculture. For the purposes of the Plan, marine aquaculture is defined as the culture and husbandry of marine algae and shellfish in state waters including within estuaries, and marine algae, shellfish, and finfish in land-based, recirculating tank operations occurring along the coast. The Plan will focus on commercial marine aquaculture; aquaculture intended for harvest for sale, and is centered on three goals; (1) Improve California's aquaculture governance framework through increased interagency coordination and transparency; (2) Maximize environmental sustainability and protect public health; (3) Facilitate sustainable development of marine aquaculture in state waters.

On October 13th, OPC invited early tribal consultation on Plan development to hear tribal priorities and early feedback on draft Plan concepts. The 60-day consultation period will conclude on December 14th. OPC held two virtual tribal roundtables, one mid-day session and one evening session, on November 3rd. These roundtables provided an open forum for discussion and questions on the draft Plan. OPC anticipates inviting a second round of tribal consultation once the draft Plan is publicly released. On [October 23rd](#), OPC staff made a presentation to the [Aquaculture Development Committee](#) (ADC) to discuss industry perspectives on the Plan, and determine how best to engage these partners in Plan development. OPC staff are working to develop a timeline and engagement strategy to ensure that the Plan reflects the needs of the industry, California Native American tribes, NGOs, and other partners.



Marine Protected Areas

OPC is working in partnership with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to address several Decadal Management Review recommendations, including the following four recommendations. First, OPC, Ocean Science Trust, and CDFW have convened a group of social science and traditional knowledge experts to develop recommendations for a MPA Social Science Research and Monitoring Plan (Recommendation #12). Second, OPC continues to work with CDFW and other partners to finalize a MPA Community Science Strategy (Recommendation #14). Both documents – the Social Science Research and Monitoring Plan and the Community Science Strategy – will be incorporated into an update to the MPA Monitoring Action Plan (Recommendation #11). This update will be released for public comment in the spring of 2026, and will be finalized by the summer. Fourth, regarding the MPA petitions (Recommendation #4), OPC is working closely with CDFW and Fish and Game Commission (FGC) staff to evaluate the petitions using a science-based approach.

Finally, the Marine Protected Area Statewide Leadership Team (MSLT) is seeking nominations for Primary and Alternate tribal representatives from the four regions: North Coast, North Central Coast, Central Coast, and South Coast. Nominations are open until January 13, 2026 and more information on how to submit a nomination can be found [here](#).

OPC looks forward to continued coordination with CDFW, FGC, members of the MSLT, external partners, and the public to finalize these important efforts.

International Union for Conservation of Nature Green List Award

In June, [California's MPA network was officially accepted to the International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#), a high-profile international certification that recognizes the most successful examples of biodiversity conservation worldwide. California's system of MPAs is the first nature network in the world to receive this honor.

Green Listing of the MPA network represents the culmination of a seven-year evaluation process conducted by IUCN in close collaboration with an expert panel of Californians representing diverse sectors such as marine ecology, fishing, recreation, tourism, and resource management. FGC and CDFW staff were instrumental in supporting this effort.



Further cementing its status as a global leader in biodiversity conservation, California helped IUCN tailor its Green List standard so that it could be applied to a large-scale network, which will ultimately help advance nature networks around the world.

Earlier this month, OPC Executive Director Jenn Eckerle and Senior Biodiversity Program Manager Mike Esgro attended IUCN's World Conservation Congress in the United Arab Emirates to officially accept the Green List award. OPC is grateful for the continued partnership and support of FGC and CDFW in managing our world-class MPA network.

OPC approves funds to support the reintroduction of the Sunflower Sea Star

At the September 30th meeting Ocean Protection Council [approved the disbursement of \\$630,014 to support the reintroduction of the critically impacted Sunflower Sea Star](#). These funds will be used to support the Captive Breeding Program, identify wild-found individuals, and streamline experimental reintroduction efforts. The grantees selected to advance this work in The Nature Conservancy, The California Academy of Sciences, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

2026-2030 Strategic Plan

Over the past year, OPC staff have worked to develop a new Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, centered on the four goals of Climate Change, Equity, Biodiversity, and the Sustainable Blue Economy. Since the public release of the draft Strategic Plan in June, OPC staff have worked to incorporate feedback from partners and members of the public, including a greater focus on climate resilience, support for fishing communities, and benefits for communities and California Native American Tribes. OPC staff are grateful for the thoughtful collaboration provided by CDFW, FGC and other partners to ensure that the Strategic Plan reflects shared state priorities. The final Strategic Plan will be released in late November and is scheduled for consideration and adoption at the December 9th Council Meeting.