

Committee Staff Summary for November 6, 2025 MRC

2. Department Barred Sand Bass Working Group**Today's Item****Information ☒****Action ☐**

Receive and discuss Department update on the Department's Barred Sand Bass Working Group formation and goals, including data collection to date in the fishery.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Department updated the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) on the recreational barred sand bass fishery, and discussed potential regulatory amendments July 17-18, 2024; MRC
- Department update and MRC recommendation related to recreational sand bass regulations November 6-7, 2024; MRC
- Commission adopted regulatory amendments April 16-17, 2025
- Commission approved MRC recommendation for a Department update at today's MRC meeting regarding a barred sand bass working group August 13-14, 2025
- **Today's Department update on working group formation and data collection November 6, 2025; MRC**

Background

At its April 2025 meeting, the Commission took final action to amend regulations for recreational take in the recreational barred sand bass fishery for a period of three years. The Commission selected a year-round sub-bag limit of 4 fish, to expire June 1, 2028 (see exhibits 1 and 2 for detailed background of the process leading up to the decision).

The Commission's decision was reached amidst uncertainty in the status of the barred sand bass stock based on available data and its interpretation. The selection of a temporary sub-bag limit was motivated, in part, by a desire to increase data collection opportunities for barred sand bass; this measure was intended to enable the recreational fishing industry and researchers to participate in gathering additional data, which could inform longer-term conservation measures for the fishery and stock. The Commission requested to receive an annual update from the Department about the status of monitoring efforts.

In July 2025, MRC recommended that the Commission request the Department provide an update at the November 2025 MRC meeting on collaborative recreational data collection efforts in the barred sand bass fishery during the 2025 summer season.

Today marks the first update to fulfill the Commission's request. The Department will give a presentation reviewing developments since the April 2025 Commission meeting, highlighting the establishment of an informal cross-interest working group, and spotlighting collaborative data collection efforts conducted during the summer (Exhibit 1). In addition, the Department invited members of the working group to attend this meeting and share perspectives following the Department's presentation.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

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Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 5, December 11-12, 2024 Commission meeting \(for background purposes only\)](#)
2. [Staff summary for Agenda Item 5, November 6-7, 2024 MRC meeting \(for background purposes only\)](#)
3. [Department presentation](#)

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

Staff Summary for December 11-12, 2024*For background purposes only***5. Recreational Take of Barred Sand Bass****Today's Item****Information** ☐**Action** ☒

Consider authorizing publication of notice of intent to amend recreational fishing regulations for barred sand bass.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| • Department update to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) and discussion on the recreational barred sand bass fishery and considerations for potential regulation changes | July 17-18, 2024; MRC |
| • Update and MRC recommendation | November 6-7, 2024; MRC |
| • Today's notice hearing | December 11-12, 2024 |
| • Discussion hearing | February 12-13, 2025 |
| • Adoption hearing | April 16-17, 2025 |

Background

The recreational barred sand bass fishery is open year-round and managed collectively with kelp bass and spotted sand bass. Current regulations were established in 2013 due to concerns about the status of kelp bass and barred sand bass populations; the regulations impose a 5-fish bag limit for any combination of the three species and a 14-inch minimum size limit.

Recent data analysis has revealed a significantly depleted population of barred sand bass in southern California. Both fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data indicate a lack of substantial recruitment in recent years, which suggests that the 2013 regulations have not adequately protected the stock. As a result, the Department began consulting with fishing industry representatives, fishery researchers, and other stakeholders to explore potential regulatory changes.

In June 2024, the Department requested, and the Commission agreed to, refer the topic of barred sand bass to MRC. MRC discussed the issue in July and November of 2024 (see Exhibit 1 for a summary of population trends, management responses, and stakeholder engagement).

Based on discussions with a Department-formed working group, at the November 2024 MRC meeting, the Department proposed for the recreational take of barred sand bass a near-term reduction of the sub-bag limit from 5 to 4 fish within the overall bag limit of 5 fish (for any combination of kelp bass, barred sand bass, and spotted sand bass), with a 3-year sunset provision. This interim measure was proposed to ensure conservation of barred sand bass while the Department, alongside stakeholders, addresses data gaps and modeling needs and evaluates potential future regulatory proposals.

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MRC supported the proposed sunset provision and recommended that the Commission authorize a notice of intent to amend regulations governing the recreational take of barred sand bass, to commence in December (this meeting), with a 3-year sunset provision as proposed by the Department. However, MRC expressed concern about the adequacy of the proposed interim sub-bag limit for barred sand bass, particularly during spawning season. Instead of endorsing a specific sub-bag limit, MRC recommended including a range of options (1-5 fish) for setting sub-bag limits during and outside the spawning season, to allow the Commission to deliberate and make the final decision.

For today's meeting, the Department's memo (Exhibit 2) outlines the recommended changes to recreational barred sand bass regulations, aligned with the MRC recommendation. The memo includes draft proposed regulatory language the Commission may choose to refine or direct staff to modify prior to notice. The proposal includes:

- a sub-bag limit for barred sand bass during the spawning season (June through August), ranging from 1 to 5 fish;
- a sub-bag limit for barred sand bass during all other months, ranging from 1 to 5 fish; and
- a sunset provision for the new regulation, repealing the regulation as of June 1, 2028.

Visual aids and additional background information on the proposal are in the Department's presentation (Exhibit 3).

If the Commission chooses to select specific sub-bag limits in the proposed regulatory language, the initial statement of reasons developed prior to issuing notice could clarify that during the rulemaking process the Commission is still considering a range of sub-bag limits for recreational take of barred sand bass.

Significant Public Comments

Two fisheries scientists and an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) recommend a zero-fish bag limit (aka closure) during the spawning season (June through August) (exhibits 4-6). The scientists argue that the barred sand bass fishery is not data-limited, it is a misconception that existing data are inadequate, and stronger measures are needed to recover spawning aggregations and rebuild the fishery (exhibits 4 and 5).

- A fisheries scientist also recommends coupling the seasonal closure with a size limit reduction to 13 inches, drawing on key vulnerability factors for the fishery and lessons learned from management measures in other fisheries (Exhibit 4).
- A scientist who served as a barred sand bass expert on the Department's collaborative working group, highlights previous management measures in the fishery and assesses contemporary scientific data, including 31 published scientific papers from 1996 to 2024 on barred sand bass. They argue a seasonal closure would not cause significant hardship to the recreational fishery, and that potential short-term economic impacts should not outweigh action necessary to ensure the fishery's long-term health. (Exhibit 5)

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- An environmental NGO urges the Commission to incorporate into its public notice a zero-fish bag limit option for June through August, and to ultimately adopt this closure option at the adoption hearing (Exhibit 6).

Recommendation

Commission staff: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations as recommended by MRC and the Department. Confirm the proposed season dates in the draft regulatory language and identify sub-bag limits for the two time periods to include in the notice, to support transparency during the notice period.

Committee: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations regarding recreational take of barred sand bass with a sub-bag limit range of 1 to 5 fish, a season date option for differing bag limits, and a three-year sunset provision.

Department: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations regarding recreational take of barred sand bass as outlined in the Department's memo and presentation.

Exhibits

1. Staff summary for Agenda Item 5, November 6-7, 2024 MRC (*for background purposes only*)
2. Department memo, including draft proposed regulatory language, received November 27, 2024
3. Department presentation
4. Email from Erica Mason, Ph.D., received November 25, 2024
5. Email from Lyall Belquist, Ph.D., received November 26, 2024
6. Email from Greg Helms, Manager, Fish Conservation Program, Ocean Conservancy, received December 2, 2024

Motion

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ that the Commission authorizes publication of a notice of its intent to amend Section 28.30 related to recreational take of barred sand bass, with a sub-bag limit range of _____ fish for the summer spawning season (June through August); a sub-bag limit range of _____ fish for the remainder of the year; and a sunset provision of three years, to expire June 1, 2028, as discussed today; and requests that the Department continue to collaborate with the sport fishing industry, researchers, and stakeholders to fill data gaps and develop longer-term management options.

Committee Staff Summary for November 6-7, 2024 MRC

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5. Recreational Barred Sand Bass Fishery

Today's Item

Information ☐

Action ☒

Receive and discuss Department's update on the recreational barred sand bass fishery, barred sand bass working group outcomes, and recommendations for potential regulation changes; develop potential committee recommendation.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Department update and discussion on the recreational barred sand bass fishery and considerations for potential regulation changes July 17-18, 2024; MRC
- **Today receive an update and recommendations for potential regulation changes** **November 6-7, 2024; MRC**

Background

The barred sand bass fishery is an historic recreational fishery in southern California that is open year-round and managed collectively with kelp bass and spotted sand bass. Current regulations include a five-fish bag limit (in any combination of the three species) and a minimum size limit of 14 inches (35.6 centimeters); these were established in 2013 due to concerns about the status of kelp bass and barred sand bass stocks.

Population Trends, Management Response, and Stakeholder Engagement

While no formal stock assessment exists for barred sand bass, abundance estimates suggest a severely depressed population in southern California. The presumed decline is likely due to a combination of environmental conditions, poor recruitment, and fishing pressure on easily targeted spawning aggregations.

The Department has analyzed available data for the species. Fishery-dependent data indicate continued declines in barred sand bass, except for the past year, with spawning aggregations becoming much smaller or difficult to find. Fishery-independent data over the past several years have shown a pulse of fish entering the fishery, corroborated by the fishery-dependent data showing a slight increase in catch. However, there has been no sizeable recruitment pulse seen behind the entry fish, suggesting that current regulations established in 2013 (lower bag limit and increased size limit) are insufficient to protect the stock, especially if the observed year class of juveniles enters the fishery and fishing effort increases.

Due to population concerns, the Department began discussions with the recreational fishing community and academic community about potential changes to barred sand bass fishery regulations. The Department also requested the Commission refer the topic to MRC and committed to bring a range of recommendations for MRC discussion.

July 2024 MRC Meeting

At the July MRC meeting, the Department presented an overview of the available data for barred sand bass, highlighted outreach to date regarding the types of potential management

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changes under consideration, and described additional collaboration with sport fishing associations and researchers to help recover barred sand bass populations while minimizing impacts to recreational fishing. The Department committed to forming a working group of researchers, recreational fishery representatives, and stakeholders to jointly develop a recommendation for recreational fishery regulations to bring to the November 2024 MRC meeting for discussion, and to support developing a potential recommendation for Commission consideration.

Update

Following the July MRC meeting, the Department convened and has worked closely with a group of sport fishing associations and researchers, including facilitating two meetings. The goals of the working group are to improve shared understanding of the current status of the barred sand bass population and fishery; develop a shared understanding of the current need for a conservation measure; identify information gaps and strategies to collaborate on future data collection; and support an open, collaborative process to share information on the species and fishery.

Today, the Department will present additional details regarding barred sand bass life history and fishery analyses reviewed with the working group, present the outcomes of the working group and its collaboratively-developed options for regulation changes, and provide recommendations for discussion and potential committee recommendation (Exhibit 1). The Department supports a management measure for a period of three years, during which time Department staff would continue to work with stakeholders to fill priority research gaps and develop a long-term conservation strategy to protect barred sand bass spawning aggregations.

Significant Public Comments

1. A sport fishing association representative, who is also a member of the Department's barred sand bass working group, supports the recommended barred sand bass sub-bag limit of four as a three-year, interim, conservation measure (Exhibit 2). They also support utilizing sport fishing organizations to fill knowledge and data gaps. In addition, they share observations about the fishery, including barred sand bass migration and spawning behavior, the relationship between catch rate and regulations, and shifts in fishing effort.
2. A representative of a recreational fishing advocacy organization shares the Department's concern about the health of the barred sand bass population and urges the Commission to take steps to allow it to recover (Exhibit 3). Rather than changing bag or size limits, they propose closing some of the known spawning aggregation sites in southern California to barred sand bass fishing for a specific period or closing barred sand bass fishing during spawning months, as there are other sport fishing opportunities available in the summer. Alternatively, they suggest the regulation changes could be a combination of some fraction of the spawning season combined with size and bag limit adjustments.

Committee Staff Summary for November 6-7, 2024 MRC*For background purposes only***Recommendation**

Commission staff: Support the Department's recommendation to advance a regulation for the barred sand bass fishery, with a regulation sunset date, and public notice in December as discussed today. Support continuation of the Department's work with stakeholders to fill data gaps and develop a long-term conservation strategy for barred sand bass.

Department: Support developing an interim regulation of a year-round bag limit of four barred sand bass, with no more than five bass in combination, with a sunset date after three years, while the Department continues to work with stakeholders to fill priority research gaps and develop a long-term conservation strategy based on best available science to protect barred sand bass spawning aggregations.

Exhibits

1. Department presentation
2. Email from Merit McCrea, Sportfishing Association of California, received October 24, 2024
3. Email from Matt Band, Allwaters Protection & Access Coalition, received October 24, 2024

Committee Direction/Recommendation

The Marine Resources Committee recommends that the Commission: (1) schedule a rulemaking with notice in December 2024 to set a year-round bag limit of four barred sand bass, with no more than five bass in combination, and a regulation sunset of three years, as recommended by the Department; and (2) support the Department's efforts to continue to work with stakeholders to fill priority research gaps and develop a long-term conservation strategy based on best available science to protect barred sand bass spawning aggregations.



Barred Sand Bass Update



6 November 2025

Presented to:

**Marine Resources
Committee**

Presented by:

**Armand Barilotti
Environmental Scientist
CDFW Marine Region**



Current Bass (*Paralabrax sp.*) Regulations

- CCR, Title 14, Section 28.30. Bass - Barred Sand, Kelp, and Spotted Sand
 - a. Minimum size: 14 inches total length or 10 inches alternate length
 - b. Limit: Five, in any combination of species, **except as provided in subsection (c)**
 - c. **Barred sand bass: Notwithstanding subsection (b), a maximum of 4 barred sand bass (BSB) may be taken or possessed**
 - d. **Sunset provision: Subsection (c) shall remain in effect until June 1, 2028, and as of that date is repealed**



Photo credit CDFW



Stakeholder Engagement

Ideas and methods that will:

- Inform a stock assessment and management strategy evaluation
- Improve understanding of the BSB population and fishery
- Develop a community of practice dedicated to stewardship





BSB Working Group (BSBWG) Meetings

- Informal advisory body composed of members of the recreational fishing industry, research scientists, and nongovernmental organizations.
- Charged with identifying gaps in essential fishery information and life history, reviewing stock assessment results, and advising CDFW on potential regulation changes to the BSB fishery.

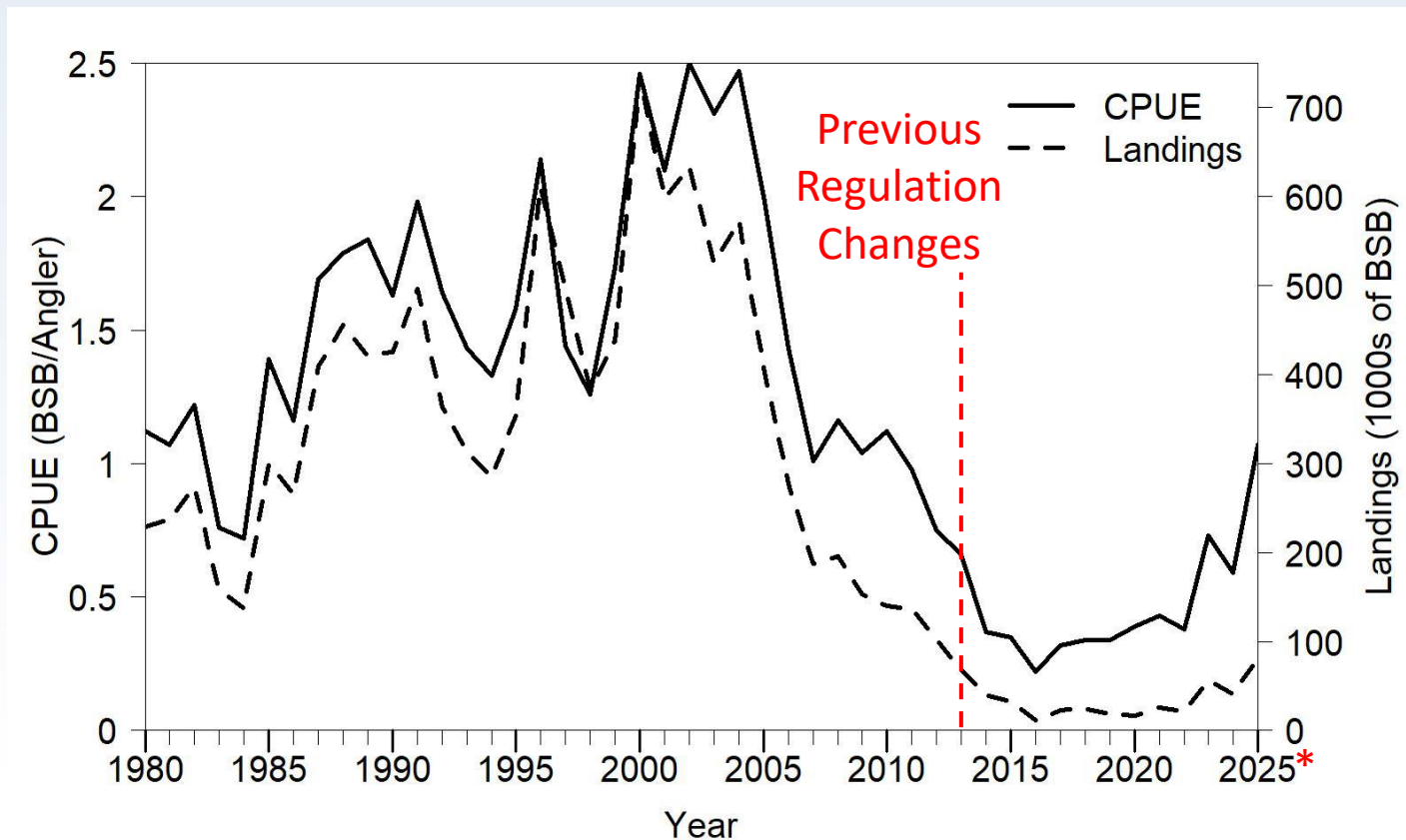


Photo credit CDFW



BSB CPFV Landings 1980 – 2025*

- Some return of BSB spawning aggregations throughout southern California
- 2025 landings >81,000 through September
 - ~41,000 landed in 2024 (MLS 2025)



CDFW Marine Log System (MLS) 2025
* Denotes preliminary data



Moving Forward

July 2, 2025
September 26, 2025

- Reconvene BSBWG with focus on research and data needs for stock assessment and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)

2025 - 2028

- Collect data for use in the stock assessment and MSE
- Conduct stock assessment and MSE with BSBWG
- Recommendations to FGC on regulatory changes



4 data types identified to collaboratively fill BSB life history gaps or make current data more robust for stock assessment

- Age structure
- Maturity and fecundity
- Release data
- Movement and migration



CDFW BSB Aging Study

- Goal: obtain the age distribution of BSB caught from the CPFV fishery to use in the stock assessment
 - length, sex, location, and otoliths of the first 15 BSB caught per trip including sublegals
 - 272 BSB otoliths through mid-October

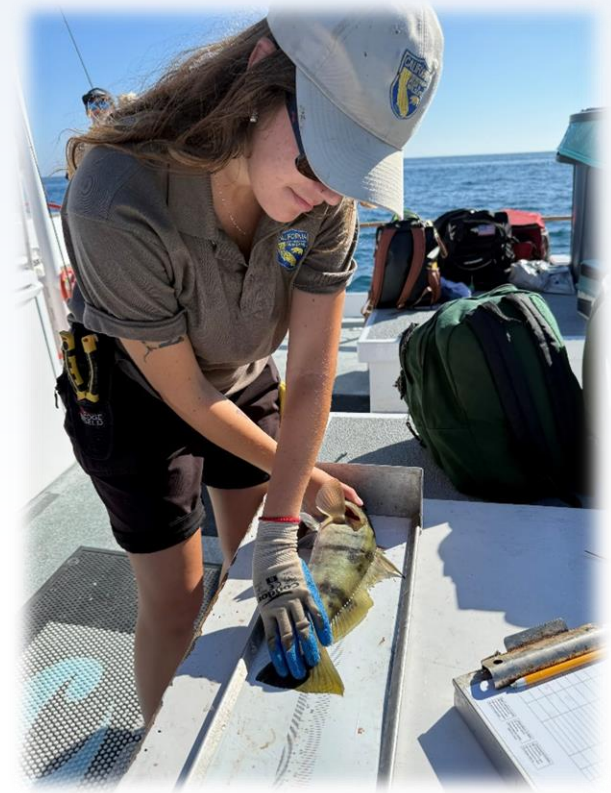
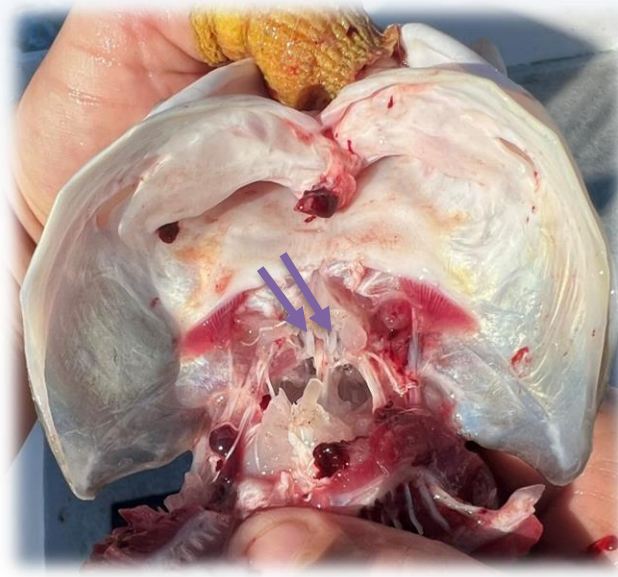


Photo credit CDFW



Collaborative Data Collection

- CCA California STAR Tournament
 - Catch per unit effort (CPUE)
 - Release data
- Sportfishing Association of CA (SAC)
 - Bluefin Data CalFishOCR (Optical Character Recognition)
 - Lengths for retained and released BSB
 - Summer pilot with 50 photo submissions



Photo Credit CCA Cal

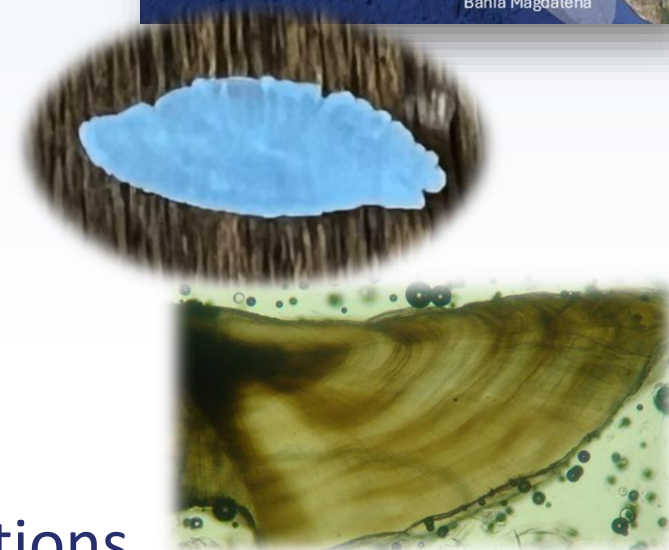


Photo Credit Brian Woolley



Future Research Studies

- Is the southern California BSB population locally sustained or reliant on migration from Baja California?
 - UCSD/CDFW Natural Tagging Study
 - Analyze trace elemental compositions and spectral signals of otoliths
 - Quantify latitudinal migration from distinct geographic locations
 - Funding pending (USC Sea Grant)
 - PIER Spaghetti Tagging Study
 - Southern CA to central Baja California
 - Recapture tagged BSB at southern CA spawning aggregations



Thank You

Armand Barilotti

Environmental Scientist

Southern California Fisheries Research
and Management Project

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Marine Region

Email: wildlifebsbteam@wildlife.ca.gov

Enhanced Status Report:

<https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/barred-sand-bass/true/>