

Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026

13B. Marine Resources Committee (MRC)**Today's Item**Information ☐Action ☒

Discuss referred topics and consider revisions to topics and timing. Consider approving draft agenda topics for the next committee meeting to be held on March 12, 2026.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Previous MRC meeting November 6, 2025; MRC
- **Consider approving MRC meeting agenda topics February 11-12, 2026**
- Next MRC meeting March 12, 2026; MRC

Background

MRC works under the Commission's direction to establish and accomplish its work plan.

Committee Work Plan

Topics referred by the Commission to MRC are displayed in a work plan for scheduling and tracking. The updated work plan is provided as Exhibit 1, which includes updates to proposed timing of topics and an update to one topic title. No new topics have been identified for potential referral at this time.

Next Committee Meeting

The next committee meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2026 in Sacramento, with public remote participation options via webinar and phone. Staff has conferred with the Department on the readiness of various proposed topics for March.

Discussion Topics

In addition to standing agenda items (such as general public comment, agency updates, next meetings, and work plan review), six discussion topics are proposed for the next MRC meeting:

1. California Halibut Fishery Management Review: Trawl Gear Bycatch Evaluation
2. White Seabass Fishery Management Review
3. Regulatory proposal final vetting: "Recreational Use of Hand-Held Harpoons and Flying Gaffs to Assist Anglers with Landing Tuna"
4. State Aquaculture Action Plan – California Ocean Protection Council
5. State Water Bottom Leases for Aquaculture Purposes – Status of Existing Leases and Pending Requests
6. Aquaculture Lease Best Management Practices Plans (*currently on hold*) – Review of opportunities, hurdles, and resource needs prior to project reactivation

Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026

Staff recommends not including two work plan topics previously slated for the agenda:

- *Coastal Fishing Communities Project*

In December, the Commission directed staff to prioritize development of options for next steps in advancing Coastal Fishing Communities Project recommendations, with discussion and potential committee action originally planned for March 2026. Given the full March agenda, staff transitions following the November meeting, and staff focus on higher priority projects (i.e., MPA petitions, evaluations, and planning for regional public meetings), staff proposes rescheduling this topic for the July 2026 MRC meeting. Postponement will allow adequate time for preparation and ensure a more productive discussion of the ten staff recommendations developed through [Coastal Fishing Communities Meetings from 2016-2018](#), which launched the project and led to Commission adoption of a new policy in 2024.

- *Method of Determining Recreational Legal Size*

This regulatory proposal, vetted at the November MRC meeting, is no longer recommended for a second vetting. The straightforward and non-controversial regulatory amendments will instead be incorporated into the sport fishing rulemaking, which the Wildlife Resources Committee recommended the Commission support (scheduled for notice in April, if approved). See *Wildlife Resources Committee* (Agenda Item 16A, this meeting) for more information.

Significant Public Comments

An environmental, non-governmental organization provides input on the trawl gear bycatch evaluation currently underway, to support the ongoing California halibut fishery management review. It commends the Department and MRC for transparency, stakeholder engagement, and improvements, such as integrating ecological risk assessments (ERAs) and productivity-susceptibility analyses (PSAs). However, it raises concerns about excluding West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) catch and discard data and cumulative bycatch analysis. The organization recommends integrating WCGOP estimates, adding expert review, assessing tow duration, and exploring electronic monitoring to maintain bycatch data. (Exhibit 2)

Recommendation

Commission staff: Approve changes to the work plan as proposed in Exhibit 1. Approve the draft agenda topics for the March 12, 2026 meeting.

Exhibits

1. [MRC work plan](#), updated January 26, 2026
2. [Letter from Caitlynn Birch](#), Pacific Campaign Manager & Marine Scientist, Oceana, received January 29, 2026

Motion

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ that the Commission approves the changes to the work plan and approves the topics for the March 12, 2026 Marine Resources Committee meeting, as discussed today.

California Fish and Game Commission
DRAFT Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Work Plan
Updated January 26, 2026

Note: Proposed changes to topics/timing are shown in blue underline or ~~strike-out~~ font.

Topics	Category	Nov 2025	Mar 2026	Jul 2026
Planning Documents, Fishery Management Plans (FMP)				
MLMA Master Plan for Fisheries – Implementation Updates	Plan Implementation			
Red Abalone Restoration Plan (statewide) Development	Restoration Plan	*		
CA Halibut Review – Bycatch Evaluation for Trawl Gear	Management Review	X	X	<u>X</u>
Kelp Restoration and Management Plan (KRMP) Development	Restoration/ Management Plan	X		<u>X</u>
White Seabass Fishery Management Review	Management Review		X	
Regulations				
Commercial Coonstripe Shrimp Fishery Management, Phase 2	Commercial Take			<u>X</u>
Recreational Use of Hand-Held Harpoons and Flying Gaffs to Assist Anglers with Landing Tuna	Recreational Take	X	X/R	
Method of Determining Recreational Legal Size	Recreational Take	X	<u>*</u>	
Marine Aquaculture and State Water Bottom Leases				
Statewide Aquaculture Action Plan	Planning Document	*	X	
Status of Existing <u>Leases and</u> Leaseholder Requests	Current Leases		X	
Applications for New Leases - San Andreas Shellfish Company (Tomaes Bay)	Lease Applications			
Lease Best Management Practices Plans (Hold, TBD)	Leases – Regulatory		X	
Special Projects, Informational Topics, and Emerging Management Issues				
Coastal Fishing Communities Project	MRC Project	X/R	<u>X/R</u>	<u>X/R</u>
Kelp Restoration and Recovery Tracking	Kelp			
Barred Sand Bass Working Group	Informal Advisory Body	X		<u>X</u>
Nearshore Groundfish Management Process	State/Federal Fisheries			<u>X</u>
Experimental Fishing Permit (EFP) Program				
Box Crab Exploratory Fishing	EFP			
Pop-Up Gear in State-Managed Fisheries	EFP			

Key: X = Discussion X/R = Recommendation and may move to Commission * = Written or oral agency update

From: Birch, Caitlynn <cbirch@oceana.org>

Sent: Thursday, January 29, 2026 01:28 PM

To: FGC <FGC@fgc.ca.gov>

Cc: Ashcraft, Susan@FGC <Susan.Ashcraft@fgc.ca.gov>; Miller-Henson, Melissa@FGC <Melissa.Miller-Henson@fgc.ca.gov>

Subject: Public Comment Agenda Item 13B

Good afternoon,

Please include the attached comment letter in the meeting materials under Item 13B for the upcoming February 11-12 Fish and Game Commission meeting. The letter is a re-submission from the December 2025 meeting.

Thank you and have a good week!

Take care,

Caitlynn

Caitlynn Birch | Pacific Campaign Manager & Marine Scientist



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President Zavaleta
California Fish and Game Commission
715 P Street, Second Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 18A Marine Resource Committee: California Halibut Trawl Management Review

Dear President Zavaleta and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the California halibut trawl management review discussed at the November 2025 Marine Resource Committee (MRC) meeting. We want to begin by expressing sincere appreciation to the MRC Co-Chairs, Department, and Halibut Management Team for the considerable effort, transparency, and stakeholder engagement that have shaped this process to date. The improvements in both the assessment and the overall review framework are evident, and we're grateful for the responsiveness shown throughout this review.

Our goal is to contribute constructively to ensure this review results in a thorough, science-based evaluation of sustainability and bycatch that can effectively inform future management options.

We want to highlight several key concerns with the proposed trawl bycatch analysis as presented at the November MRC.

- The current proposed approach does not incorporate available estimates of total catch and total discards from the Federal West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP), which has monitored and generated valuable and scientifically vetted data and estimates over several decades for this fishery. These estimates are essential for evaluating total biomass removed and understanding sustainability risks to species caught as bycatch in the trawl fishery.
- The review does not include an assessment of cumulative bycatch or total catch of all species in assessing ecosystem impacts. Evaluating cumulative impacts, across all species, and an overall discard rate is necessary to understand the broader ecological footprint of this multi-species trawl fishery.

At the same time, we want to acknowledge areas where the Department is doing strong work.

- The virtual and in-person workshops have been well-run, highly informative, and responsive to input.
- The integration of Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) and Productivity–Susceptibility Analyses (PSAs) meaningfully advances this review and provides important insight for data-limited species.
- We appreciate the clear framework distinguishing species along a target-to-bycatch continuum, and the Department's commitment to evaluating species that are both retained and discarded according to their dual mortality impacts.

Lastly, we respectfully offer several recommendations to strengthen the analysis and support effective future management.

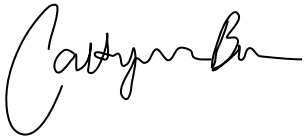
- Integrate existing WCGOP estimates of total catch and total discards is needed to provide a more complete picture of the fishery's overall ecological footprint. Using these long-standing datasets

and assessing total removals will strengthen the review and better illuminate species specific and ecosystem-level sustainability considerations.

- Including outside experts' review the analysis will help validate the approach and strengthen confidence in the results.
- We strongly recommend analyzing trawl tow duration as part of the bycatch assessment. Tow times in this fishery vary widely and are known to influence discard mortality.
- With federal observer coverage ending, we urge the Department and Commission to explore creative solutions to maintain future bycatch data—such as pilot electronic monitoring programs.

We share the goal of using this analysis to better inform future management and improve the long-term sustainability of our state trawl fishery. Thank you again for the Department and MRC's thoughtful work on this review and for the opportunity to provide input. We look forward to continued engagement.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caitlynn Birch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Caitlynn Birch
Pacific Campaign Manager & Marine Scientist
Oceana