

**Meeting Summary and Outcomes**  
**Recreational Abalone Advisory Committee (RAAC)**  
**Saturday, October 4, 2008**  
**Oakland, California**

**RAAC Members Present:** Ian Taniguchi, Steve Campi, Richard Pogre, Steve Benavides, Brooke Halsey, Lt. Steve Riske, Ed Schultze (alternate).

**Others Present:** DFG – Nancy Foley (Deputy Director: Enforcement), Dr. Laura Rogers Bennett, Jerry Kashiwada, Christy Juhasz.  
Member of the public – Bill Bernard

### **Executive Summary**

On October 4, 2008, the Recreational Abalone Advisory Committee (RAAC) conducted its annual meeting in Oakland, CA.

Key outcomes from the meeting were as follows:

- **Approval of draft minutes from June 28, 2008, special meeting in Bodega Bay, CA.** No corrections were made and the minutes were approved.
- **Enforcement report presented and written report submitted (Lt. Riske).** Abalone enforcement continues to be a high priority within the Department of Fish and Game. New laws applicable to abalone described and evaluated in regards to enforcement efforts. New tagging requirement seems to improve compliance with filling out cards.
- **Proposed Budget 08/09 presented (Taniguchi).** The current budget will require an increased allotment. Increasing the fee for abalone cards to generate more revenue would require legislation and an increase might be incorporated with increased fees for plastic tags if they are implemented in the future.
- **Recommendation to balance expenditures between science and enforcement.** A RAAC member expressed concern that the budget overemphasizes biological work and not enough money is spent on enforcement. Recommend additional \$50,000 to be spent on enforcement overtime. Draft letter to Fish and Game Director discussing history of the Abalone Fund and the need to improve balance of expenditures which has favored science too heavily over enforcement.
- **Updates from the June 28 meeting in Bodega Bay**
  - **RAAC's role and purpose in abalone regulation and management.** Steve Benavides will represent RAAC on the Al Taucher Hunting and Fishing Committee. This will provide RAAC a direct communication link to the Fish and Game Commission.

- **Abalone tag/report card system development.** The Department is examining plastic tag options but the tags will not be feasible until the Automated Licensing Data System is functional. A card will still be required to record catch information. Distribution of plastic tags will be different from the current system which depends on license agents.
- **RAAC involvement in MLPA Initiative process.** The RAAC will have members on two teams involved with selecting marine protected areas in southern California. There is concern that the North Central MPAs will concentrate abalone fishing effort by reducing the number of available access points and lead to local depletions.
- **Abalone Fishery Assessment updates**
  - **Summary of first triennial status of northern California recreational fishery (Kashiwada).** The average density of abalone in dive surveys is within the sustainable fishery range and no changes are recommended in abalone regulations. A revised TAC of 249,000 was calculated using 2004-2006 abalone card and telephone survey data. Creel survey data show few reasons for concern. Some concerns for the future of the fishery are discussed.
  - **Essential abalone fishery information - abalone recruitment modules, reproduction, disease (Dr. Rogers-Bennett).** Presented update of recruitment index and reproductive condition index studies. Experiment at Bodega Marine Laboratory using red abalone collected at San Miguel Island and exposed to El Niño, La Niña, and ambient temperature regimes found better survival with lower temperatures. Increased mortality at higher temperatures is attributed to the presence of the bacteria which causes Withering Syndrome.
  - **Larval abalone plankton research, boulder sampling, and microchemistry study (Juhasz).** Discussed results of plankton tows and boulder sampling used to sample larval and newly settled abalone. Microchemistry project has been initiated to examine newly settled abalone shells for chemical signatures that could allow identification of source site.
  - **An update to the San Miguel Island fishery consideration process was given to the RAAC (Taniguchi).** Surveys on San Miguel Island completed for 2008. The RAAC received copies of reports to the Abalone Advisory Group on the progress of the Technical Panel in developing a Total Allowable Catch for San Miguel Island.
- **Recommendation to the Director of Fish and Game to examine reopening the sport red abalone fishery along the coast in San Mateo County if there are adequate resources.**
- **Steve Campi resigned as RAAC Central California representative and secretary.**

## Key Outcomes

- 1. Approval of draft minutes from June 28, 2008, special meeting in Bodega Bay, CA.** No corrections were made and the minutes were approved.
- 2. Enforcement report with written report submitted (Lt. Riske).** Abalone enforcement continues to be a high priority within the Department of Fish and Game. New laws applicable to abalone include requirement of all persons taking abalone to have report cards, requirement that all retained abalone have tags, and completion of cards and tagging requirements immediately upon leaving the water. New tagging requirement seems to improve compliance with filling out cards. Abalone fishing effort seems to be lower this year for a variety of possible reasons including high fuel costs, poor economy, weather, lowest tides occurring in the middle of the week, unusually heavy kelp growth which was a contributing factor in the deaths of two abalone fishermen and possibly the implementation of the abalone tag system. To address problems encountered with the current tags, next year the tags will be larger and printed on tyvek. No substantial changes in the tags were made for the coming year but when the Automated Data License System (ALDS) is implemented, the Department may use plastic tags which would be more convenient to use but more costly. Purchase of more than one card is another enforcement problem which could be addressed by the ALDS.
- 3. Proposed Budget 08/09 (Taniguchi).** The current budget will require an increased allotment. The budget covers 3.5 biologist positions, a scientific aid, half time for a senior pathologist and one Special Operations Unit (SOU) position. Printing costs for abalone cards and tags have increased to \$44,000 from the \$12,000 printing cost before tags were required. A RAAC member expressed concern that the budget overemphasizes biological work and not enough money is spent on enforcement. Increasing the fee for abalone cards to generate more revenue would require legislation and an increase might be incorporated with increased fees for plastic tags if they are implemented in the future. The RAAC should have a meeting in early spring to discuss the budget. The single meeting in the fall has been occurring after spending for the current budget year begins.
- 4. Recommendations to balance expenditures between science and enforcement.** The RAAC recommends additional \$50,000 to be made available for enforcement overtime with the appropriate spending authority. These funds would be in addition to overtime funds of \$50,000 for uniform patrol and \$16,000 for Special Operations Unit (SOU). Draft letter to Fish and Game Director discussing history of the Abalone Fund and recommending better balance of expenditures which favor science too heavily over enforcement. The following recommendation was made: **“The RAAC recommends to the director that the current and future budgets significantly increase the portion allocated to wildlife protection efforts and special operations unit. The RAAC further recommends that the \$50,000 that was previously authorized for enforcement overtime be made available to Wildlife Protection with the appropriate spending authority.”**

## 5. Updates from the June 28 meeting in Bodega Bay

- **Increasing RAACs role in abalone regulation and management.** Steve Benavides will represent RAAC on the AI Taucher Hunting and Fishing Committee. This will provide RAAC a direct communication link to the Fish and Game Commission. Campi and Benavides will draft a letter to the Commission asking for an appointment to the AI Taucher Committee.
- **Abalone tag/report card system development.** Brooke Halsey attended a meeting discussing design options for future abalone tags. The Department is examining plastic tags but the tags will be more feasible when the Automated Licensing Data System is functional and will help curtail multiple purchases by the same people. A card would still be required to record catch information. Tag distribution issues were discussed and it is likely fishermen will be buying applications for abalone cards and tags which are distributed from a central location. Representatives of recreational fishermen did not express opposition to increased fees to cover the cost of tags.
- **RAAC involvement in Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) process.** The RAAC will have members on two teams involved with selecting marine protected areas in southern California. Dr. Paul Dayton was named to the Southern California Master Plan Science Advisory Team. Steve Benavides will be a member of the MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group. There is concern that the North Central MPAs will concentrate abalone fishing effort by reducing the number of available access points and lead to local depletions. A possible solution would be to have drawings for limited number of tags for heavily used sites.

## 6. Recommendation to the Director of Fish and Game to examine reopening the sport red abalone fishery along the coast in San Mateo County.

The presence of sea otters in Santa Cruz County will preclude reopening abalone fishing in the county. There are areas that might support an abalone fishery in San Mateo County but they will probably not support the level of effort seen in northern California. Limiting the take from the area that might be solved by requiring the use of two tags per abalone and having a reduced daily bag limit. RAAC voted to recommend reopening the sport red abalone fishery in San Mateo County if there are adequate resources. The following recommendation was made: **“The RAAC recommends to the Director that the Department recommend to the Commission that the San Mateo and Santa Cruz County coasts be opened to recreational abalone harvesting.”**

## 7. Abalone Fishery Assessment updates

- **Summary of first triennial status of northern California recreational fishery (Kashiwada).** The average density of abalone in dive surveys is within the sustainable fishery range and no changes are recommended in abalone regulations. A revised TAC of 249,000 was calculated using

2004-2006 abalone card and telephone survey data. Creel survey data show few reasons for concern. Future concerns are low reproduction, low densities of abalone in deeper water, rapid depletion of recently opened Stornetta Ranch, continued long distances traveled by fishermen at Moat Creek, and evidence of poaching. Size frequency data from dive surveys show few abalone smaller than 5 inches and could be a cause of concern for the future. A graduate student developed an anonymous compliance survey method to estimate non-compliance with abalone regulations and found the highest non-compliance rate was 29% for the daily bag limit.

- **Essential abalone fishery information – density studies, abalone recruitment modules, reproductive condition, and disease (Dr. Rogers-Bennett).** Discussed density studies, recruitment index update, reproductive condition update and laboratory experiment studying survival of San Miguel Island abalone in different temperature regimes. Reproductive condition as reflected by gonad index is highly variable between years. Spawning might be related to drops in temperature. Abalone Recruitment Module data from Van Damme and San Miguel Island show peaks in juvenile abalone abundance in 2005. An experiment at Bodega Marine Laboratory using red abalone collected at San Miguel Island and exposed to El Niño, La Niña, and ambient temperature regimes found better survival with lower temperatures. Increased mortality at higher temperatures is attributed to the presence of the bacteria which causes Withering Syndrome. A subsequent study will evaluate the ability of the survivors to reproduce. Distributed copies of written Abalone Health Report by Dr. James Moore, Bodega Marine Lab.
- **Larval abalone plankton research and microchemistry of small abalone (Juhasz).** Discussed results of plankton tows and boulder sampling used to sample larval and newly settled abalone. Larval abalone successfully sampled at several sites in northern California with plankton nets. Boulders covered with crustose coralline algae were collected by divers and processed to find newly settled abalone. Newly settled juvenile abalone were found at Van Damme, Stornetta Ranch and Arena Cove in 2007. Microchemistry project has been initiated to examine newly settled abalone shells for chemical signatures that could allow identification of source site.
- **An update to the San Miguel Island fishery consideration process was given to the RAAC (Taniguchi).** Surveys on San Miguel Island completed for 2008. The Abalone Advisory Group (AAG) will have a meeting possibly in early December to get an update from the Technical Panel reporting on progress in determining TAC options. The RAAC received copies of reports to the Abalone Advisory Group on the progress of the Technical Panel in developing a Total Allowable Catch for San Miguel Island.

## 8. Other business.

- **Next meeting scheduled for March 28, 2009 at Los Alamitos.** Meeting earlier in the year will allow consideration of budget before spending of funds begins.
- **Steve Campi resigned as RAAC Central California representative and secretary.** Steve had been one of original members. He will help find replacement.

**9. Meeting adjourned at 16:00.**