

Meeting Summary and Outcomes
Recreational Abalone Advisory Committee (RAAC)
Saturday, November 21, 2009
Oakland, California

RAAC Members Present: Ian Taniguchi, Steve Benavides, Chris Voss, Rocky Daniels, Brooke Halsey, Lt. Steve Riske, Ed Schultze (alternate).

Others Present: DFG –Dr. Jim Moore, Jerry Kashiwada.
Member of the Abalone Advisory Group – Bill Bernard

Executive Summary

On November 21, 2009, 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 October 4, 2008, meeting in Oakland, CA.** No corrections were made and the minutes were approved.
- **Enforcement report with written report submitted (Lt. Riske).** No changes in overtime funding for 2008-2009 fiscal year but for 2009-2010 fiscal year, the additional \$50,000 in overtime which was previously approved by RAAC will be available. The new Marine Protected Areas will be an added diversion of enforcement efforts.
- **Update of San Miguel Island Red Abalone Fishery Consideration Process.** The Technical Panel suggested moving forward with an experimental fishery on the southwest side of San Miguel Island. The AAG will present alternatives for a fishery at SMI on February 18 to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) sub-panel of the Commission. The RAAC would like clarification of whether it can write directly to the Commission regarding the SMI fishery and other issues.
- **Proposed Budget 09/10 presented (Taniguchi).** The RAAC would like clarification of whether a charge for printing the abalone cards puts administrative costs over the 20% limit. The managers propose cutting Jim Moore's half PY position to balance the current budget. Brooke Halsey will draft a letter from RAAC to the Director opposing the use of RAAC funds for a risk assessment analysis for the experimental SMI abalone fishery (estimated cost of \$41,000).
- **Recommendation to balance expenditures between science and enforcement.** Steve Benavides will draft a letter for the RAAC recommending more funds to be spent on enforcement for either more permanent positions or more overtime.

- **Marine Life Protection Act Updates**
 - **North Central Coast Initiative.** The Integrated Preferred Alternative for the North Central Coast was approved by the Fish and Game Commission and will go into effect January 1, 2010. The Draft Monitoring Plan for the North Central Coast is completed and was opened to public comment. The red abalone a key indicator species for the condition of the MPAs.
 - **South Coast Initiative.** The Blue Ribbon Task Force was not allowed to create an MPA on San Clemente or San Nicolas Islands but military closures off San Clemente Island prohibit transit of boats and essentially establish reserves with exceptional enforcement. An MOU is being worked out to allow the Department to conduct experiments in the closure zones which would address the need to conduct outplanting, aggregation and larval seeding experiments for abalone in southern California.
 - **North Coast Initiative.** Nominations for the Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) are being taken. The advantage of having a RAAC representative on the RSG was discussed but no decision was made.

- **Abalone Fishery Assessment updates**
 - **Fishery Index Sites Surveys (Kashiwada).** The average abalone density for all transects through 2009 was 0.52 abalone/m². At 0.50 abalone/m the ARMP recommends a reduction in the allowable catch. Factors other than an actual drop in density could contribute to the lower densities. An estimate of sustainable annual catch for Fort Ross was one-fourth to one-fifth of the current take level. Methods for reducing catch at Fort Ross and other heavily used sites will probably be needed soon.
 - **Abalone Health Report (Dr. Jim Moore).** New regulation requires a permit for abalone imported into California for the aquarium trade or terminal market to prevent spread of diseases. The abalone herpes virus is now on the catastrophic disease list. The Bodega Marine Lab (BML) has white abalone and black abalone for restoration work. An infestation of an introduced sabellid worm is now considered eradicated.
 - **An update of San Miguel Island red abalone surveys (Voss).** The Scientific Review Committee suggested an experimental abalone fishery in the southwest zone. A sampling procedure was developed to monitor the effect of the fishery and establish a baseline before the fishery starts. The Adams Cove reserve will be used as a control.

- **Replacement of vacant RAAC positions.** The two nominations for central coast representative are Carol Rose of Cencal and Bill Bernard. A telephone interview will be scheduled to allow RAAC members to evaluate the candidates. Dr. Paul Dayton resigned and a new RAAC science member is also needed.

- **Public Expression.** Ed Schultze commented access is shrinking due to new MPAs and suggested that at the next meeting the RAAC should examine options to reduce fishing pressure on abalone.

- **Next meeting.** The next meeting scheduled for April 17, 2010 near Orange County Airport and will focus on the budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

Key Outcomes

1. **Approval of draft minutes from October 4, 2008, meeting in Oakland, CA.**
No corrections were made and the minutes were approved. The minutes will be posted on the Department website.
2. **Enforcement report with written report submitted (Lt. Riske).** Abalone enforcement did not change much from previous year. No changes in overtime funding for 2008-2009 fiscal year but for 2009-2010 fiscal year, the additional \$50,000 in overtime which was previously approved by RAAC will be available with the recent approval by the Governor of a Budget Change Proposal. Administrative costs reduce the overtime funds available by 20%. Common card violations include reusing tags, altering dates on cards and buying multiple cards. Repeat offenders seem to be increasing as is the number of large over-limits. The possible use of plastic tags was investigated and the main obstacle would be additional cost and increased difficulty with distribution. Some state parks will be closed and enforcement help from park rangers will be reduced due to budget problems. Some enforcement effort will be diverted to patrol the new Marine Protected Areas. The Automated License Data System (ALDS) is selling licenses online but has not been fully implemented due to problems created by the wide variety of license and card requirements in California.
3. **Update of San Miguel Island Red Abalone Fishery Consideration Process.**
The Technical Panel work on the TAC is completed as is the stock assessment report issued early this year. Peer review of stock assessment report evaluated models used and determined that population levels would decline with or without a fishery. The models incorporate weak stock-recruitment relationships and assume no production. The risk assessment for the stock is for a single year and a more robust risk assessment which covers five or ten years or longer was recommended. The Technical Panel suggested moving forward with an experimental fishery on the southwest side of San Miguel Island with an allowable catch of 10% of the legal sized (8 inches) abalone. The AAG is working on a report for four alternatives for a fishery at SMI and will make a presentation on February 18 to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC), a sub-panel of the Commission. The Department is exploring funding for the additional risk assessment modeling. The RAAC would like clarification of whether it can write directly to the Commission regarding the SMI fishery.
4. **Proposed Budget 08/09 (Taniguchi).** The RAAC would like clarification of whether a charge for printing the abalone cards is proper since there is already 20% taken for administrative costs and total administrative costs are not supposed to exceed 20%. The spending authority for this fiscal year is \$708,500. In the past, the budget could be exceeded because excess spending authority from other projects could be used but the transfer of spending authority will no longer be allowed and the budget must now agree with spending authority. The managers propose cutting Jim Moore's half PY position to balance the current budget. RAAC members generally believe work done by Moore is necessary and worth

the money expended. Brooke Halsey will draft a letter from RAAC to the Director opposing the use of RAAC funds for a risk assessment analysis for the experimental SMI abalone fishery (estimated cost of \$41,000).

5. Recommendation to balance expenditures between science and enforcement.

Steve Benavides will draft a letter for the RAAC recommending more funds to be spent on enforcement for either more permanent positions or more overtime.

6. Marine Life Protection Act Updates

- **North Central Coast Initiative.** The Integrated Preferred Alternative for the North Central Coast was approved by the Fish and Game Commission and will go into effect January 1, 2010. The Draft Monitoring Plan for the North Central Coast is completed and was opened to public comment. The red abalone is in tier 1 which makes it a key indicator for the condition of the MPAs.
- **South Coast Initiative.** The Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) was not allowed to create an MPA on San Clemente or San Nicolas Islands but military closures can serve the same purpose. For many years a research reserve had been sought in southern California to conduct outplanting, aggregation and larval seeding experiments for abalone. Two military closures were established in the waters off San Clemente Island which prohibit transit of boats. An MOU is being worked out to allow the Department to conduct experiments in the closure zone which would be well protected. RAAC's representation on the BRTF was important in promoting the use of military closure zones for abalone research.
- **North Coast Initiative.** Nominations for the Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) are being taken. The advantage of having a RAAC representative on the RSG was discussed but no decision was made.

7. Abalone Fishery Assessment updates

- **Fishery Index Sites Surveys (Kashiwada).** Abalone densities at four index sites over the past two years have generally been much lower than previous surveys. Average density for all transects was 0.52 abalone/m² which is slightly above the ARMP trigger of 0.50 abalone/m for recommending a reduction in the allowable catch. The three Sonoma County sites surveyed over the past two years showed a 50% drop in density from previous surveys. Factors other than an actual drop in density could contribute to the lower densities. Transect sites are randomly selected and changed each survey so differences in density could result from differences in transect location. Weather conditions often prevent divers from surveying more exposed transect sites. Rougher weather in 2006 confined transects to more sheltered areas which might have lead to higher densities. Some of the reduction in density could have been due to more widely distributed transects in 2009 at the Sonoma

County sites. Estimates of catch using cards and telephone surveys show far more abalone being caught at Fort Ross than any other site and the proportion of the Fort Ross catch has increased substantially in the past few years. The number of legal sized abalone in the Fort Ross area was estimated to be 185,000, assuming most abalone would be taken within the 0 to 5 m (0 to 15 ft) depth range. Current rates of catch would remove all legal sized abalone from the area in a few years. The average size of abalone caught during the 2009 creel survey and age data from tagging studies were used to estimate a sustainable annual catch of 12,000 abalone which is one-fourth to one-fifth of the current take level. The calculation assumes reproduction is constant which might not be the case. Abalone Recruitment Modules at Van Damme show wide variation between years. Possible methods of reducing catch at Fort Ross and other heavily used sites include specially marked tags (perhaps six per card), lower bag limit, shorter season, and special cards drawn in lottery.

- **Abalone Health Report (Dr. Jim Moore).** New regulation requires permit for abalone imported into California for the aquarium trade or terminal market to prevent spread of diseases. The abalone herpes virus is now on the catastrophic disease list. To check for the Withering Syndrome (WS) rickettsia bacteria in the Crescent City area, the lab will have a voluntary program in which fishermen would turn in digestive tracts from sport caught abalone which can be tested for WS with a molecular test. Recent sample from Point Reyes was negative for WS. Recent work at Bodega Marine Lab (BML) found large amounts of water flowing north during upwelling relaxation periods which could transport WS bacteria north. BML has the four surviving wild origin white abalone and will be the center for white abalone research. Seventy-five lab reared white abalone at UC Santa Barbara will be divided between UCSB, BML, and the Aquarium of the Pacific as a precaution. BML also has black abalone for restoration work which have been treated to eliminate the WS pathogen. An infestation of an introduced sabellid worm which had escaped from the Abalone Farm and infected native Tegula snails is now considered eradicated. Future research would be to see the long-term effects of infection of the WS pathogen on red abalone held at ambient BML temperatures which are typical of the north coast. Experiments with green abalone showed much less effect of warmer water on the health of WS infected green abalone as compared to red abalone.
- **An update of San Miguel Island red abalone surveys (Voss).** Data from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 surveys were used to identify high abalone density areas. The Scientific Review Committee suggested an experimental fishery in the southwest zone. A sampling procedure using a combination of random and fixed transects was developed to monitor the effect of the fishery and establish a baseline before the fishery starts. The Adams Cove reserve will be used as a control. Annual monitoring will be conducted initially to investigate the power of the new sampling strategy. The management of the SMI abalone fishery will include modifications of the TAC if temperature increases result in increased mortality due to WS.

Enforcement procedures still need to be developed for the proposed SMI fishery and will need to address concerns about northern California abalone being passed through the fishery. Progress has been made in distinguishing northern from southern California abalone with genetic tests. The fishery will also need to pay for the management and enforcement of the fishery.

8. Replacement of vacant RAAC positions. The two nominations for central coast representative are Carol Rose of Cencal and Bill Bernard. A telephone interview will be scheduled to allow RAAC members to evaluate the candidates. Dr. Paul Dayton resigned and a new RAAC science member is also needed.

9. Public Expression. Ed Schultze commented access is shrinking due to new MPAs and suggested that at the next meeting the RAAC should examine options for shortening the season and restricting access to the hardest hit areas by creating zones similar to deer management.

10. Other business.

- **Next meeting.** The next meeting is scheduled for April 17, 2010 near Orange County Airport. The meeting will mainly discuss the budget before spending for the fiscal year begins.

11. Meeting adjourned at 16:00.