

Meeting Summary and Outcomes
Recreational Abalone Advisory Committee (RAAC)
Saturday, December 4, 2010
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Santa Ana, CA

RAAC Members Present: Ian Taniguchi, Steve Benavides, Brooke Halsey, Capt. Steve Riske, Peter Haaker, Carol Rose, Chris Voss, Ed Schulze (alternate).

Others Present: Laura Rogers-Bennett, Jim Moore, Jerry Kashiwada, Derek Stein, Craig Shuman, Bill Bernard, Christy Juhasz, Paul Romanowski.

Executive Summary

On December 4, 2010, the Recreational Abalone Advisory Committee (RAAC) conducted their annual meeting using a room provided by RAAC member Steve Benavides in Santa Ana, CA. The main purpose of the meeting was to update members on issues related to the budget, abalone enforcement, population status, recovery efforts and possible new regulations.

Key outcomes from the meeting were as follows:

- **RAAC members updated on enforcement efforts, the northern California abalone fishery regulatory change process, the San Miguel Island fishery consideration process, the Marine Life Protection Act Initiatives, abalone disease issues, northern California abalone fishery assessment, larval abalone studies, abalone recruitment, genetic studies and southern California abalone surveys and restoration work. The RAAC will be involved with proposed regulatory changes at the discussion phase of the Fish and Game Commission process.**
- **Updates for the current budget were discussed.**
- **Next meeting scheduled.** The next RAAC meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2011 in South San Francisco and will primarily cover budget recommendations for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

Key Outcomes

1. **Enforcement Report.** RAAC enforcement representative Captain Steve Riske updated members on recent enforcement developments. The Automated License Data System (ALDS) is now functional and will be used for all 2011 license sales. The ALDS should help prevent purchasing of multiple abalone cards by people trying to take more abalone than the annual limit which has been one of the main enforcement problems. Wardens are seeing numerous repeat offenders which indicates the black market value is high. Lookouts are being used more often by fishermen taking more than the legal limit. Rock pickers are having trouble finding legal sized abalone and are frequently failing to properly reattach undersized abalone. Failure of proper reattachment is a problem because it increases mortality of undersized abalone. Two checkpoints conducted. Most checkpoint violations involved the abalone report cards. Furloughs and low number of wardens on the coast hampered enforcement efforts. Abalone continues to be a high priority for enforcement. Valuable information is being provided by the public through CalTIP.

- 2. Northern California Abalone Fishery Regulatory Change Process.** Ian Taniguchi reported on recent discussions on possible changes in abalone regulations. Ian presented data at the June 2010 Fish and Game Commission meeting indicating average abalone density at index sites was close to the 0.50 abalone/m² trigger in the Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP) for a 25% reduction in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC). It was possible surveys conducted that summer could have resulted in an average density below the trigger for a 25% TAC reduction. At the October 2010, Marine Resources Committee (MRC) of the Commission, Ian presented results of surveys showing average abalone density at the index sites was close to the trigger but still above it. The MRC expressed interest in proactively reducing the abalone catch and is considering changing the starting time for abalone fishing from a half-hour before sunrise to 8:00 a.m. and closing the Fort Ross area to abalone fishing for the first two months of the season. The later start time will help reduce effort of the rock picker segment of the fishery which is showing the heaviest impacts to abalone populations and the early season closure of Fort Ross will help reduce effort at the most heavily impacted index site. The Fort Ross early season closure is also a step towards implementing zonal management featured in the ARMP long-term management plan. The MRC is interested in moving toward zonal management and away from managing the fishery as a whole which would require amendment of the ARMP. RAAC members believe improving the return rate of cards will be important in moving towards zonal management without greatly increasing expenditures.
- 3. San Miguel Island Fishery Consideration Process.** Ian Taniguchi discussed the current status of the San Miguel Island Fishery Consideration Process. Abalone Advisory Group (AAG) work has stalled while waiting for additional risk assessment modeling work to be contracted and completed. After a series of unsuccessful efforts to find external funds to conduct the risk analysis the Department found internal funds to do the work. A contract is being processed with Dr. Yan Jiao of Virginia Tech who completed the earlier work to produce models for a SMI fishery.
- 4. Budget update.** Ian Taniguchi presented the budget for 2010-2011. Salary costs should be lower since the costs were based on a 5% decrease in pay but the current decrease in pay is about 14%. Ian included current card sale figures which are down compared to recent years. Further expenditure reductions were made when a contract for divers to help with surveys was not done this year but some of the costs usually covered in the dive contract were shifted to other areas in the budget. Another savings might be in costs for printing abalone cards which would probably not be incurred with the new Automated License Data System. A spring RAAC meeting is proposed to discuss the budget for next year.
- 5. MLPAI updates**

 - a. North Coast Initiative** Bill Bernard described the proposed MPAs and discussed issues with different sites. The North Coast had a single unified proposal. Native American interests were more involved with the process than had been in previous study areas. The North Coast MPAs will have little impact on the recreational red abalone fishery. Popular abalone fishing access points were kept open. North Coast MPAs which allowed abalone fishing were considered by the Science Advisory Team (SAT) to have moderate low protection which is a downgrade from the moderate level of protection given in the North Central study area. The North Coast proposal does not meet MLPA guidelines.
 - b. South Coast Initiative** Steve Benavides described the MLPA process for the South Coast area. Each stakeholder group had their own plan. Large amounts of data were available through EcoTrust and the commercial sector had more influence because there was more data for them. Four plans brought to the Blue Ribbon Task Force which needed to produce a single plan. The proposed reserves do not meet Science Advisory Team guidelines. Military closures on San Nicolas and San Clemente Island will create valuable reserves.

6. Abalone Fishery Assessment Updates

a. Abalone Health Report Jim Moore presented update on RLP, the bacterium causing withering syndrome (WS). Recreational fishermen in the Crescent City area are being used to collect samples from red abalone to test for WS bacterium. Red abalone from Bodega Head sampled for RLP were 31% positive but none of the abalone were shrunk. White abalone brought to Bodega Marine Lab for basic research on reproduction and outplanting. Most mortality of captive abalone have been attributed to shell lesions caused by boring organisms. Treatment of shells with paraffin wax has been very successful. A herpes virus has caused high mortality in Australian abalone and has led to development of procedures to control the spread of the virus. He is working on tracking of live imported abalone which could introduce abalone pathogens to the state.

b. Fishery Index Sites Surveys Jerry Kashiwada presented results of dive surveys and discussed limitations of abalone population growth. Abalone densities are close to the ARMP trigger to lower the catch by 25%. Overall density is 0.54 abalone/m² and the trigger is 0.50 abalone/m². Abalone population growth is limited by slow growth (7 inch abalone are 10 – 12 years old) and low reproductive rates. Abalone card and telephone survey data show Fort Ross is the heaviest used site and dive surveys show abalone densities there are getting close to a trigger which would close the site. As discussed earlier, regulation changes are being considered by the Commission.

c. Abalone Recruitment Laura Rogers-Bennett discussed results of populations models, larval red abalone, abalone recruitment and genetic studies. There is not a lot known about the larval stage in red abalone. Plankton nets are being used to collect larval red abalone. Abalone Recruitment Modules have been monitored for ten years and indicate 2005 was the best year for abalone recruitment when the spring transition was late. This weather pattern seemed to favor red abalone reproduction but was associated with the lowest reproductive rate for Cassin's auklets in 35 years of monitoring and was also very poor for salmon populations.

d. Abalone Genetics Studies Laura Rogers-Bennett reported results of genetic studies. Flat and pinto abalone were found to be closely related. Black abalone were genetic outliers. Red abalone showed no geographic pattern and Van Damme was found to have the most genetic variation.

e. Southern California recovery efforts Derek Stein outlined recovery efforts for southern California abalone populations. White and black abalones are listed as endangered under the Federal endangered species act. Pink, green and pinto abalones are species of concern. Abalone densities in southern California are low so timed search surveys are done instead of transect surveys. San Miguel Island (SMI) red abalone densities were about 1200 per hectare with the southwest having the highest densities. Red abalone on SMI are usually with 93% in groups of two or more. Aggregation experiments are being done at one site on San Clemente Island and two sites on Catalina Island. Aggregated abalone are tagged with PIT tags and have had good survival. Limited recovery is being seen in a few areas.

7. Public Expression Ed Schultze thought that at some time in the future, the number of people could be limited in some areas by limiting number of tags sold using the ALDS.

8. Next meeting Proposed date is March 19 in South San Francisco. Carol Rose will provide location for the meeting.