

Ocean Protection Council

Major Accomplishments

As of September 2008

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) was established in September 2004 to help coordinate and improve the protection and management of California's ocean and coastal resources. In 2006, the OPC adopted a Five-Year Strategic Plan. The OPC's most important assets may well be its ability to show leadership on issues of vital importance to our coast and ocean and to empower the people of California to voice their concerns to an influential state body that can make a difference. The following is a list of specific accomplishments, organized around the categories in the strategic plan.

GOVERNANCE

Science Advisory Team – Established a team of internationally renowned scientists to ensure science informs OPC decision making.

In February 2007, the OPC designated the Executive Director of the Ocean Science Trust to act as Science Adviser to the OPC. In February 2008, the OPC adopted the first OPC Science Advisory Team made up of 25 renowned scientists from California and across the nation who will help ensure that the best available science is applied to OPC and other ocean policy decisions.

Water Quality Enforcement – Helped establish a pilot project between the State Water Board and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to improve water quality enforcement actions in Southern California.

The State Water Board and DFG both are responsible for protecting California's water quality. In early 2008, the OPC facilitated a meeting of enforcement professionals from the State Water Board and DFG to identify ways the departments can best work together to accomplish California's water quality goals. Staffs from both departments have been conducting joint inspections of facilities suspected of violating our water quality laws. The OPC is considering the possibility of funding a DFG warden to assist the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board.

RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Seafloor Mapping – Committed to mapping all California state waters by 2010.

We know more about the surface of the moon than the bottom of the ocean. In 2006, the OPC set a goal to complete a map of the seafloor beneath all of California's ocean waters by 2010. To date, the OPC has approved \$11.5 million to complete these maps and as of September 2008, maps for about half of the total area has been completed. The OPC gathered experts from state and federal agencies, academia and industry to complete this project. By providing a better understanding of seafloor topography, the final maps will improve ocean management.

Ocean Observing – Created a statewide, comprehensive ocean current monitoring system that is used to inform oil spill response and other real-time management decisions.

Now in its fourth year of implementation, the state-funded Coastal Ocean Currents Monitoring Program (COCMP) is providing useful information about the movement of pollutants in California waters. Ocean current maps and pollution trajectory forecasts were provided for the November 2007 Cosco Busan oil spill in San Francisco Bay, for outfall diversion management in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Orange counties, and to monitor and manage an unprecedented year of red tides. The OPC is continuing to develop, in cooperation with the federal Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), an ocean observing system that will address critical ocean management issues including climate change, salmon recovery, sediment management, ocean energy feasibility, and marine protected area monitoring.

OCEAN AND COASTAL WATER QUALITY

Once-Through Cooling – Established as state policy a goal to reduce the negative marine impacts of once-through cooling by 90-95 percent.

California coastal power plants are permitted to uptake approximately 16 billion gallons of seawater a day in once-through cooling systems. This leads to the killing of an estimated 9 million fish and invertebrates and 80 billion of their eggs and larvae each year, as well as one seal, sea lion, sea turtle, or other large marine animal each week. To address these concerns, the OPC has:

- Urged the State Water Resources Control Board to implement a policy that results in a 90-95 percent reduction in impacts for cooling operations.
- Directly informed the State Water Board draft policy by completing studies on the feasibility of eliminating once-through cooling systems at coastal power plant facilities and the potential impacts to California's electricity grid from reducing or eliminating once-through cooling systems.

Marine Debris – Called on California to take aggressive action to reduce marine debris.

California's coast and ocean are littered with trash, the vast majority of which is plastic designed to last hundreds of years. Every year, marine debris injures and kills thousands of animals through ingestion or entanglement.

- In February 2007, the OPC called on California to take aggressive action to reduce marine debris.
- In October 2007, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 258, a bill based on the OPC's recommendation to prevent the discharge of plastic waste in the form of "nurdles," small pellets that make up 17 percent of the junk found on beaches in Southern California.
- On July 29, 2008, OPC staff released a draft plan to implement the solutions identified in the OPC's February 2007 resolution.

Low Impact Development (LID) – Prioritized LID as the primary method of controlling polluted runoff from future development and redevelopment in California.

LID is a highly effective stormwater control technique that is gaining momentum in California and across the country. In May 2008, the OPC created a far-reaching plan to promote LID, through what the OPC called "a practicable and superior approach that new and redevelopment projects can implement to minimize and mitigate increases in runoff and runoff pollutants." If implemented widely, LID will greatly reduce the single biggest source of pollution that plagues our ocean and other waterways: polluted runoff.

OCEAN AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – Launched a cutting-edge monitoring program for the statewide MPA network.

Governor Schwarzenegger has made the establishment of a statewide network of MPAs a high priority. To support this effort, the OPC:

- Funded comprehensive baseline monitoring to determine how well the new MPAs are working.
- Granted \$2 million to the Ocean Science Trust to create an MPA Monitoring Enterprise, whose purpose is to determine how best to conduct effective and efficient MPA monitoring.
- Funded a socioeconomic study to analyze the impacts of different MPA network proposals and a study to help DFG identify data gaps in Southern California.

Innovative Fisheries Management – Helped launch a program designed to revolutionize fisheries management.

California's fishing industry is in trouble. Commercial landings peaked in 1981 at over 900 million pounds and declined to 292 million pounds by 2005. This makes it difficult for fishermen to focus on long-term sustainability and profitability. In February 2007, the OPC committed \$2 million to the California Fisheries Fund, which will offer loans to California fishing communities and groups attempting to make their fishing practices more environmentally and economically sustainable.