Staff Recommendation
December 9, 2025

Item 8

Action Item:
Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds for Offshore Wind Monitoring and Research

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Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to $3,000,000 to California Sea Grant to support responsible offshore wind (OSW) development by establishing the West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (WCSC) and providing competitive and discretionary funding to address knowledge gaps and priority science needs.

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.1 Enhance Engagement with Tribes. Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through a Sustainable Blue Economy; Objective 4.4 Guide Sustainable Renewable Energy Projects.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits: Better understanding of baseline conditions and potential environmental impacts from OSW development can inform decision-making to avoid, minimize, and mitigate negative impacts on marine ecosystems, as well as local communities, including California Native American tribes and communities already burdened by environmental and social injustice.

Exhibits:

Exhibit A: Draft Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommend that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Budget Act of 2024, which included a $3 million appropriation to support offshore wind energy environmental research, monitoring, and adaptive management.; and
3. The proposed projects are not 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations section 15378."

Staff further recommend that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

"OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to $3,000,000 to California Sea Grant to support efforts to inform responsible OSW development, subject to the condition that projects selected through a competitive review process will be presented to the Council for final concurrence for grant awards.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, California Sea Grant shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management, and delivery."

Executive Summary:

As California pursues its ambitious OSW energy goals—5 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045—it will need a strong scientific foundation to safeguard ecosystems, tribal cultural resources, and coastal communities throughout OSW construction and operation. To ensure responsible OSW development California must develop monitoring protocols and best practices that reflect best available science and developing technologies. Determining the specifics of these protocols will need to be collaboratively informed by agencies, California Native American tribes, OSW leaseholders, and scientists. Establishing the WCSC will create a forum for cross-sector collaboration and scientific guidance to improve understanding of the potential impacts from OSW development.

This proposed investment will support the WCSC's initial activities, build from prior OPC investments, and fund near-term monitoring and research needs to advance environmental monitoring protocols and best practices, address key knowledge gaps, and support priority scientific needs. To inform responsible OSW development and mitigation strategies, currently

identified needs include analyzing existing monitoring programs, conducting risk assessments for important species and habitats, collecting targeted baseline data, and improving sampling during underrepresented seasons such as winter months. Together, these actions will strengthen the scientific basis and collaborative structure needed to assess project-level and cumulative impacts and to support adaptive management strategies for OSW.

Project Summary:

Background:

California is committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 as part of its broader efforts to address climate change. Reaching this ambitious clean energy target will require a diverse energy portfolio that includes OSW, with planning goals of 5 GW by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. To date, OSW development in the United States has focused on fixed-bottom turbines in the Atlantic Ocean. In contrast, California's deep offshore waters have been identified for floating OSW projects, and development has advanced quickly in recent years. In June 2023, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management issued five OSW leases—two in the Humboldt Wind Energy Area and three in the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area. Because floating OSW is a new and emerging industry in California, and commercial OSW developments at the scale proposed offshore of California do not yet exist, the state must take proactive steps to understand and minimize potential impacts on the environment, tribal cultural resources, and coastal communities.

OPC's previous investments of more than $3 million have supported OSW planning through the California Offshore Wind Energy Modeling Platform, data catalogs for the Humboldt Wind Energy Area and Morro Bay Wind Energy Area, and the Updated Report: Identifying Wind Energy Areas Off the California Coast, which identified potential development sites balancing environmental impacts with energy benefits. OPC has also supported baseline data collection through an eelgrass distribution survey in Humboldt Bay that will be used to inform offshore wind port development

OPC has prioritized fishing community engagement in OSW development by funding the California Fishermen's Resilience Association to coordinate California Commercial Fishermen's Port Associations participation in the California Offshore Wind Energy Fisheries Working Group. This group, led by the California Coastal Commission, is developing a statewide strategy to minimize potential effects on the commercial and recreational fishing industries and tribal fisheries. OPC is participating in the working group and has also funded the development of a socioeconomic methodology framework for commercial and tribal fisheries for the statewide strategy. Through the Central Coast Fishing Heritage Story Map and North Coast Fisheries Mapping Project, OPC has mapped critical fishing grounds off Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino counties. OPC has

additionally funded collaborative efforts between the California Energy Commission and tribes to develop shared cultural resources data.

In December 2024, OPC approved funding for the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to develop comprehensive environmental monitoring guidance to support OSW development in California. This guidance will draw on existing information and subject-matter expertise to identify the most relevant potential environmental impact questions and evaluate appropriate monitoring methods and approaches for floating OSW. It is expected to be completed in spring 2026. However, once this guidance is finalized, additional work will still be required to develop specific monitoring standards and protocols, including best practices for data collection and management. Further refinement and monitoring of baseline conditions will also be necessary, which will require both analysis of existing monitoring data and the collection of new data.

During the development of the environmental monitoring guidance, the need for a transparent cross-sector forum to coordinate and collaborate on potential environmental impacts from OSW was also identified. Initial scoping for this effort was led by OPC in close coordination with other state agencies, including the California Coastal Commission, California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and California State Lands Commission. As part of the scoping process, OPC also engaged with federal agencies, Oregon and Washington state agencies, zand held early consultation with California Native American tribes in winter 2024.

Following this initial scoping, a more formal planning process was undertaken. This phase included additional engagement with federal and state agencies, tribal roundtables, and formal consultation with California Native American tribes during summer and fall 2025. The feedback gathered through this process informed development of the Draft Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (Blueprint; Exhibit A), which outlines a proposed organizational structure and early activities for the WCSC.

Project Summary:

This project will support the launch and initial research and monitoring activities of the WCSC, following a public feedback process on the Blueprint. The WCSC is designed to provide independent, objective scientific expertise, including tribal science and Traditional Knowledges, that can inform coordinated environmental research, monitoring and analysis, as well as support regulatory decision making and ongoing adaptive management. It will serve as a forum for cross-sector collaboration and coordination, helping ensure that environmental monitoring and research related to OSW development are aligned across individual projects and at a regional scale. This coordination is essential for evaluating impacts within lease areas as well as cumulative effects across broader regions. Early priorities include developing standardized monitoring protocols,

defining the scope and work plans for the fisheries and tribal cultural resources subcommittees, and developing a plan for long-term success.

Through competitive and discretionary funding, this project will advance existing investments to develop environmental monitoring guidance, address key knowledge gaps, and support priority scientific needs, such as risk assessments for important species and habitats, targeted baseline data collection, and improved sampling during seasons that are currently underrepresented, such as winter months. Specific monitoring and research priorities will be refined during the WCSC's initial activities and through the development of a competitive monitoring and research solicitation.

This project will accomplish the following objectives:

- Support the participation of California Native American tribes, scientists, subject matter experts, and academic partners in the WCSC's committees and workstreams.
- Develop monitoring protocols and best practices that are scientifically rigorous, operationally feasible, and responsive to regulatory requirements as well as the information needs of the broader scientific and stakeholder community.
- Fund priority scientific work to address knowledge gaps and strengthen baseline data collection for species and ecosystems.

OPC staff will lead the facilitation and launch of the WCSC. OPC and California Sea Grant will jointly support initial activities, which will include forming subcommittees and technical working groups and developing monitoring protocols. California Sea Grant will administer honoraria and manage both discretionary and competitive project funding, while OPC will retain decision-making authority and oversight of funding allocations. California Sea Grant will also provide post-award grant administration, including progress reporting and financial accounting.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

This funding directly advances Goal 1 of OPC's Equity Plan: Equitable Engagement, Outreach, and Funding, specifically Strategies 1.2.1 and 1.3.4, by providing potential funding opportunities for coastal communities and tribes in OSW research and monitoring. The WCSC additionally advances the Equity Plan through a transparent and collaborative organization structure, which will help ensure the concerns and needs of coastal communities, including fishermen and underserved port communities, and tribes are considered. The WCSC also aligns with OPC's Tribal Engagement Strategy Goal 4, Integrating Equity in Coastal and Ocean Science and Research and specifically Objectives 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 by ensuring tribal science and Traditional Knowledges are meaningfully included in the structure of the WCSC Steering Committee and in the work done by the Subcommittees. Subcommittee members and, where feasible, co-chairs, will include tribal

scientists and Traditional Knowledge holders. The Tribal Cultural Resources Subcommittee will be tribally-led. OPC recognizes that tribal knowledges, perspectives, and science are often place-based, holistic, and reflect the interconnectedness of all life, which may be challenging to fit into the topical structure of the Subcommittees. OPC is committed to ensuring that tribal science and Traditional Knowledge are meaningfully included in the work of the Subcommittees,

About the Grantee:

California Sea Grant is a unique partnership that unites federal, state, and university resources across California to create knowledge, products, and services that benefit the economy, the environment, and the citizens of California. California Sea Grant has an established, highly respected process for administering working groups and competitive solicitations related to science needs for coastal and ocean resource management. California Sea Grant is experienced at convening and facilitating large groups, synthesizing complex scientific information, and administering peer review processes. Recently, California Sea Grant was awarded OPC funding to support the integration of best available science into the state's Kelp Restoration and Management Plan and long-term monitoring of the Marine Protected Areas Network through convening of science advisory committees and structured peer review process.

Project Timeline:

The WCSC is expected to launch in spring 2026 and OPC staff anticipate opening a competitive solicitation in fall 2026, with selected projects brought to the Council for approval in 2027. Timelines for individual projects are expected to be up to two years.

Project Financing:

Staff recommend that OPC authorize encumbrance of up to $3,000,000 to California Sea Grant to support the launch and initial activities of the WCSC and provide competitive and discretionary funding to address knowledge gaps and priority science needs.

Ocean Protection Council	Up to $3,000,000
TOTAL	**Up to $3,000,000**

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2024, General Fund appropriation to OPC for OSW energy environmental research, monitoring, and adaptive management activities. The proposed project supports the purpose of this appropriation by funding baseline monitoring

and research and supporting responsible OSW energy development through the creation of the WCSC.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves only data collection, research and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.