Staff Recommendation
June 16, 2026

Item 9

Action Item:
Consideration of Adoption of the Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind

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Recommended Action: Adopt the Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (WCSC) and direct staff to work with tribal, agency, and other partners to implement this document.

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Objective 4.2: Understand and minimize impacts from offshore wind on the environment, tribes, and coastal communities. Goal 4.2.1 By 2026, complete a roadmap for monitoring the environmental impacts of offshore wind consistent with the Assembly Bill 525 Offshore Wind Strategic Plan; fund at least five priority baseline monitoring projects by 2027. Goal 4.2.2: By 2026, establish a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind that provides independent scientific expertise to inform coordinated research, monitoring, data analysis, and investment priorities. Goal 4.2.3: By 2029, through the West Coast Science Collaborative, develop a coordinated environmental research and monitoring program that includes Traditional Knowledges, standards for data collection and management, and clearly communicates scientific findings to the public.

Exhibits:

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

Exhibit B: Draft California Offshore Wind Environmental Monitoring Framework

Exhibit C: Public Comments Received on the Draft Blueprint

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommend that the Ocean Protection Council adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 et seq. of the Public Resources Code:

"OPC hereby adopts *the Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind* (Exhibit A) and directs staff to work with tribal, agency, and other partners to implement this document."

Executive Summary

Floating offshore wind (OSW) is one of several renewable energy sources being considered as part of California's transition to a carbon neutral economy. Federal OSW leases have been issued in the Humboldt and Morro Bay Wind Energy Areas, and the state is now building the scientific and regulatory foundation needed to support responsible development of this emerging technology. A West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (WCSC) will create a forum for cross-sector collaboration and scientific guidance to improve understanding of the potential impacts from OSW development off the California coast.

The *Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind* (Blueprint; Exhibit A) describes the WCSC's purpose, structure, and foundational activities. The foundational and multi-benefit activities outlined in the Blueprint align with the current pace of OSW development and the capacity of partners to meaningfully engage. OPC staff recommend adoption of this Blueprint to advance this near-term work while the Blueprint may inform a future launch of the WCSC.

Project Summary:

Background:

California's path to carbon neutrality by 2045 depends on a diverse portfolio of renewable energy sources. OSW could play an important role in diversifying the state's portfolio of resources. 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. Since that time, one leaseholder has voluntarily ended their lease off Morro Bay. Because floating OSW technology is still new and commercial scale projects do not exist, California is working to better understand and address potential impacts of this technology 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.

In December 2024, OPC funded the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to develop a comprehensive framework for monitoring potential environmental impacts from floating OSW (Framework; Exhibit B). This Framework identifies the most relevant environmental impact questions and evaluates monitoring methods and approaches for floating OSW in California, drawing on existing information and subject-matter expertise. The Framework will be a key resource, among others, that is expected to support the efforts of the WCSC.

The comprehensive Assembly Bill 525 Offshore Wind Energy Strategic Plan, developed by the California Energy Commission in coordination with other state agencies, identifies potential strategies to address environmental and ocean use considerations. Recommendations include promoting coordination and collaboration among lessees on surveys, comprehensive monitoring plans, and project implementation to minimize environmental impacts. During development of the monitoring framework, the need for a transparent, cross-sector forum to coordinate and collaborate on potential environmental impacts from offshore wind was also identified, resulting in OPC's development of this Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (WCSC).

WCSC Structure and Approach:

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. The WCSC will bring together federal and state agencies, California Native American tribes, OSW leaseholders, environmental non-profit organizations, scientists, and the fishing community to create a cross-sector forum for coordination and shared scientific guidance.

To support this work, the WCSC is structured around a Steering Committee that provides direction and makes decisions on cross-cutting issues, a Coordination Committee that supports implementation, and topical Subcommittees that supply scientific and technical expertise. Tribal science and Traditional Knowledges are incorporated throughout, including through a tribally led Tribal Cultural Resources Subcommittee.

The Blueprint provides a clear vision for the WCSC, including its purpose, structure, and foundational activities. However, given that OSW development on the West Coast is still in its early

stages and partners are navigating uncertain federal agency participation and limited industry capacity, OPC is focusing on foundational and multi-benefit work that strengthens the scientific basis for OSW planning that the WCSC will need to operate effectively, rather than launching the full Collaborative structure at this time.

Process:

The Blueprint was developed through extensive outreach and engagement with state and federal agencies, California Native American tribes, environmental non-governmental organizations, and community members. This engagement included:

- Initial scoping with federal agencies, Oregon and Washington state agencies, and early consultation with California Native American tribes, during Winter 2024.
- Formal planning including further engagement with federal and state agencies, tribal roundtables, and formal consultation with California Native American tribes in Summer and Fall 2025.
- Release of the Draft Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind (Draft Blueprint) on November 26, 2025, discussion on the Draft Blueprint at the December 2025 Council meeting, followed by a public webinar, a third round of consultation with California Native American tribes, and a written public comment period from February 4, 2026 through April 1, 2026.

Revisions from Draft to Final:

OPC received 10 individual comment letters (Exhibit C: Public Comments Received on the Draft Blueprint) on the Draft Blueprint, many of which were submitted by coalitions of multiple organizations. The final Blueprint reflects revisions based on input received, as well as an updated practical approach to initiating the WCSC that recognizes the current pace of OSW development on the West Coast and the capacity of partners to engage. Key updates include:

- Elevated Goal #4 (Synthesize and communicate monitoring data, analysis, and research findings through transparent public reporting across all project phases that summarize results from ongoing monitoring and research efforts) as Goal #1, and public-facing reports now encompass all project phases rather than solely post-construction.
- Expanded federal agency participation by adding the United States Geological Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Marine Mammal Commission, and the Department of Energy to the Steering Committee.
- Added language allowing Steering Committee member groups to designate a primary and alternate representative for their seat and to self-organize a caucus.

- Added a new foundational activity, development of a "Science Questions, Priorities and Needs Assessment".
- Removed Development of Monitoring Protocols and Guidance Documents as an initial activity to be completed by the WCSC.
- Removed Fisheries Subcommittee scope and work plan development as an initial activity to be completed by the WCSC.

Next Steps

OPC will lead two foundational activities identified in the final Blueprint in the near term. The first is to complete a Science Questions: Priorities and Needs Assessment (Assessment). For the WCSC to successfully direct its work, it must first identify and build a shared understanding of the key scientific questions and priorities within its purview. The Assessment will bring together information from previous and ongoing efforts, including but not limited to the Framework, a tribally led working group process that will collect tribal monitoring priorities and recommendations, and state and federal regulatory requirements. The Assessment will also offer an early view of how current monitoring efforts align with key questions, highlighting strengths, gaps, and recommendations. This analysis will be of value to the broader scientific community and will guide the Steering Committee and Subcommittees once they convene.

The second activity is an effort to identify tribal monitoring priorities and recommendations. Tribal cultural resources exist in many forms and may be subject to impacts arising from ground-disturbing actions, environmental change, or other activities that modify the settings and conditions that support them. This effort will identify culturally appropriate approaches and indicators for monitoring place-based cultural resources and the environmental conditions affecting tribal lands, waters, and resources. Because monitoring efforts often support many applications, this work will focus on potential impacts from OSW while also considering broader monitoring needs and recommendations.

The Council previously approved disbursement of funds to California Sea Grant (CASG) for a complementary effort focused on baseline monitoring and research needs in California's OSW lease areas. CASG will administer a competitive solicitation to fund priority research and monitoring that addresses critical knowledge gaps 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. OPC staff are working closely with CASG to develop the solicitation, which is expected to be released in Fall 2026.

Together, these parallel efforts will build the scientific foundation needed to ensure that California is well-positioned to advance environmentally responsible OSW development.