



June 15, 2026

California Ocean Protection Council
715 P St., 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted electronically to COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov

Re: Item 8. Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Support Fisheries Management – Support as updated

Dear Secretary Crowfoot and Councilmembers,

On behalf of Fish On's community of anglers and spearfishers, we support the updated staff recommendation and encourage your approval of the disbursement of funds to support fishery management and endangered species recovery.

Barred sand bass, white seabass and California halibut are three important fisheries to our community and Fish On is deeply engaged in these management processes. We see these proposed investments in California fishery management as necessary contributions to the scientific foundation of effective management of these and other fisheries. Fishery management often does not include the perspectives, or yield beneficial outcomes, for subsistence and shore-based fishing communities. We hope to see this suite of investments improve processes and broaden stakeholder input so that future management actions can be more nimble and precautionary in the face of climate change and as a result, improve access to these fisheries for marginalized fishing communities. Addressing data gaps, incorporating external peer review processes and reducing the ecosystem impacts of fishery practices are all critical actions. And the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) must stand by the best available science in future management recommendations to the Fish and Game Commission (FGC).

A recent FGC stakeholder survey¹ revealed stakeholder demographics as 86 percent male, 70 percent white, and 82 percent aged 45 or older. This is evidenced throughout FGC and CDFW processes and opportunities for input. The recreational and commercial fishing interests consistently represented within working groups and decision-making opportunities do not represent the diversity or breadth of California's ocean dependent communities. Going forward, we hope to see the state identify specific communities that have been marginalized, and ensure

¹ Staff Summary for February 11-12, 2026, Author: David Haug, David Thesell, and Melissa Miller-Henson
11A. Commission Executive Director's Report <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=241317&inline>

a shift in the flow of benefits to these communities that have been the most burdened by past and ongoing fishery management practices. External facilitation and collaboration with CDFW's Deputy Director for Strategic Engagement, Equity and Partnerships on working groups and other stakeholder processes is a critical and necessary step towards safer and more inclusive participation in fishery management. We are grateful for OPC's commitment to and investment in improving these processes.

Thank you for your consideration of investments in state managed fisheries. We appreciate OPC's leadership in advancing equity and environmental justice in fishery management and look forward to continued partnership with OPC and other state agencies to ensure that fishery management reflects the best available science and the diverse perspectives of all Californians.

Respectfully,

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Anupa Asokan
Founder and Executive Director
Fish On



June 15, 2026

Secretary Wade Crowfoot, Council Chair
California Ocean Protection Council
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Agenda Item 8 – Support for California Halibut Fishery Management and Monitoring Projects

Dear Chair Crowfoot and Members of the Ocean Protection Council:

Oceana and Resource Renewal Institute respectfully submit this letter in support of Agenda Item 8 and the proposed investments in California halibut fishery management, bycatch reduction, and monitoring. We appreciate the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) for identifying critical fisheries management needs and advancing investments in science, monitoring, and adaptive management. We are particularly supportive of the proposed funding for the following California halibut projects.

These investments and proposed projects should remain focused on currently open California halibut trawl grounds.

California Halibut Fishery Management (\$1,030,000)

This investment provides an important opportunity to strengthen the scientific foundation for California halibut fishery management and build on ongoing efforts to improve long-term fishery sustainability and reduce bycatch in the halibut trawl fishery. Developing a stock assessment and management strategy evaluation (MSE) is critical to ensuring that California halibut fishery management is informed by assessment products capable of supporting management reference points, harvest control rules, catch limits, and overfishing thresholds. Ultimately, the success of the investments in this assessment and MSE will be measured by its ability to provide managers with practical tools for establishing science-based management objectives and long-term sustainability targets.

Given the significance of the ongoing California halibut trawl fishery review before the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), we support the use of peer-review as part of this effort. External expert input will strengthen confidence in the resulting analyses, provide additional technical expertise, and help ensure that future management decisions are informed by the best available science.

We also look forward to the recommendations and report products generated through these projects, including the data modernization scoping effort, which should help guide the development of a monitoring framework that improves data quality, strengthens bycatch assessments, and increases transparency and accountability in fisheries management.

California Halibut Trawl Gear Modification Testing and Bycatch Investigations (\$295,000)

We're pleased to see this funding support efforts to improve understanding of bycatch dynamics in the California halibut trawl fishery and to identify practical mitigation strategies. The California halibut trawl fishery catches more than 235 species, including 26 species of sharks and rays, giant sea bass, seabirds,

marine mammals, and the federally threatened Southern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of green sturgeon.¹

Research on gear modifications, post-release mortality, non-target species interactions, and bycatch reduction strategies will identify practical measures to reduce ecological impacts, improve selectivity, and support the long-term sustainability of the fishery. We encourage and support the emphasis on projects that can be translated directly into management measures, including evaluation of larger mesh sizes to reduce juvenile and non-target catch, tow time limits to improve discard survival, marine mammal deterrents, and other operational or gear modifications that reduce bycatch and protected species interactions.

Bycatch of the Southern distinct population segment (DPS) of green sturgeon warrants particular attention. The California halibut trawl fishery is a significant source of bycatch of this Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed population.² The fishery currently lacks a mechanism authorizing these interactions under the ESA, underscoring the need for timely development of an appropriate management framework, such as a Fishery Management Evaluation Plan (FMEP) under the ESA's 4(d) rule.³ Projects should focus on analyzing established encounter patterns and environmental drivers to support spatial and temporal management measures to reduce interactions, which will support future federally approved FMEPs or conservation plans.

State Observers for the California Halibut Trawl Fishery (\$620,000)

We strongly support funding for state observer coverage of the trawl fishery that will provide important data and inform long-term electronic monitoring solutions. Independent observer data are essential for accurately characterizing catch composition, discard rates, bycatch mortality, protected species interactions, and compliance with management measures. Maintaining robust monitoring coverage is particularly important given the recent loss of observer coverage previously provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service through the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, and the need to develop a long-term state operated monitoring plan for the fishery in that absence. Reliable observer data are critical for evaluating the effectiveness of bycatch reduction measures and informing ongoing management discussions at both the Department and Commission.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits

Lastly, while meaningful engagement with commercial and recreational fishermen is an important component of fisheries management, the OPC and Department need to prioritize broader participation, equitable public engagement and outreach, and ensure that the benefits of these investments extend to Tribes, underserved coastal communities, subsistence users, and other Californians who depend on healthy marine ecosystems.

Thank you to the Department and OPC for advancing these important investments in California fisheries management. We support the proposed funding package and look forward to the scientific and

¹ CDFW 2026. Staff Summary for March 12, 2026 Marine Resources Committee meeting - Item 5. Available: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=242516&inline>

² NMFS 2021. Endangered Species Act (ESA) 5-year Status Review for the Southern DPS of North American green sturgeon. Available: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/green-sturgeon-5-year-review>

³ [50 C.F.R. § 223.210\(c\)\(2\)](#).

management improvements these projects can provide for California halibut, associated marine species, and California's coastal ecosystems.

Sincerely,

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Caitlynn Birch
Pacific Campaign Manager & Marine Scientist
Oceana

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Webb". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Scott Webb
Director of Advocacy
Resource Renewal Institute



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
MEGHAN HERTEL, Director

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June 12, 2026

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: Support for Actions to Advance Strategic Plan Goal 4: Enable a Sustainable Blue Economy that Protects Ocean Health

Dear Secretary Crowfoot,

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has worked closely with the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to identify shared priorities and supports the proposed actions under Items 7, 8, and 9. The suite of activities proposed for approval and funding represents a coordinated, strategic investment in California's ability to manage its marine resources effectively and adaptively in alignment with the goals of OPC's Strategic Plan.

The work supported through Item 8: Support for Fisheries Management will significantly advance climate-ready fisheries management in California. Key advancements include development of responsive decision support tools that are tuned to California's dynamic marine ecosystem. These proposed investments will improve collection of essential fishery information that will directly support sustainable harvest and bycatch management while preparing the state for broader implementation of electronic monitoring and reporting systems. The funding will advance several major fishery specific initiatives that continue to modernize California's fishery management toolbox and will help ensure California's fisheries are managed with the best available science and have improved opportunities for stakeholders and California Native American tribes to participate.

Additionally, the proposed investments will ensure continuity in endangered white abalone restoration efforts by maintaining field capacity during a gap in federal funding. This work is

essential to advancing outplanting, recruitment surveys, and multi-partner restoration actions that underpin recovery of this iconic species.

Item 9 and the Adoption of the Blueprint for Building a West Coast Science Collaborative Blueprint for Offshore Wind represents an important step toward establishing a coordinated, science-driven approach to understanding and minimizing impacts from offshore wind development on fish, wildlife, marine, and estuarine ecosystems. The Department remains committed to working closely with OPC, California Native American tribes, and our other partners as implementation of the West Coast Science Collaborative advances and informs planning and permitting for offshore wind projects.

Finally, the Department has worked closely with OPC staff and supports adoption of the Statewide Marine Aquaculture Action Plan (AAP) and implementation of the AAP through disbursement of funds to support the development of the Aquaculture Science Plan (Item 7). The AAP will establish a coordinated, comprehensive management and regulatory framework for local, state, and federal resource managers, California Native American tribes, industry participants, and stakeholders, that maximizes sustainability of marine aquaculture operations while maintaining a robust level of environmental protection using the best available science.

These various efforts represent a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to marine resource science and management—improving data quality, enhancing transparency, modernizing management tools, supporting coastal communities, and strengthening resilience across California's marine ecosystems.

OPC's support has been and will continue to be critical to ensuring a sustainable blue economy that protects ocean health. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (805) 568-1246 or r7regionalmgr@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Craig Shuman, D. Env.
Marine Regional Manager

cc: Kirsten Ramey-Burbank, Environmental Program Manager
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Resources Legacy Fund[®]

June 8, 2026

Delivered via electronic mail to: COPCpublic@resources.ca.gov

Secretary Wade Crowfoot
Members of the Ocean Protection Council
715 "P" Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for sustainable fisheries projects to be considered at June Ocean Protection Council meeting.

Dear Secretary Crowfoot and Members of the Ocean Protection Council:

Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) is pleased to express its strong support for the sustainable fisheries projects proposed for the Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) consideration at its June 2026 meeting.

California's marine ecosystems and fisheries are experiencing unprecedented change due to climate change. Ensuring that the state's fisheries remain sustainable, productive, and resilient will require continued investment in science-based management, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive decision-making. The suite of projects before you represent an important opportunity to advance those objectives while supporting the long-term health of both marine resources and the fishing communities that depend upon them.

The proposed work under Section 8a of the staff recommendation closely aligns with the OPC's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan: Safeguarding Our Coast and Ocean for All Californians, particularly its emphasis on climate resilience, healthy coastal and ocean ecosystems, and the advancement of equitable and durable solutions for California's ocean economy. The projects also advance core objectives of the Marine Life Management Act and California's Master Plan for Fisheries.

RLF values its strong partnership with OPC and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Through ongoing collaboration and our shared Memorandum of Understanding, our organizations have worked together to advance innovative approaches to fisheries sustainability, climate adaptation, and using technology to improve data collection. This proposal builds upon that successful partnership and represents a meaningful opportunity to continue supporting California leadership.

We appreciate OPC's consideration of this proposal and continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

Kaitilin Gaffney
Senior Advisor
Resources Legacy Fund