

MBNMS Conservation Working Group Statement

October 16, 2012

CWG Co-Chairs: Geoff Shester and Lauren Dockendorf

CWG Members:

Sarah Damron (Surfrider Foundation)
Lauren Dockendorf (Save Our Shores) [Co-chair]
Carol Maehr (American Cetacean Society)
Patricia Matejcek (Sierra Club, Ventana Chapter)
Harriet Mitteldorf (At-Large)
Nick Naccari (Native Animal Rescue)
Geoff Shester (Oceana) [Co-chair]
Steve Shimek (Monterey Coastkeeper)
Deborah Streeter (Upwellings Ministry)
Anna Weinstein (Audubon California)

The Conservation Working Group met on Friday, October 5 at Moss Landing Marine Lab. In addition to CWG members, the meeting was attended by Kirk Schmidt (SAC Chair), Bonnie Van Hise (Congressman Farr's office), Steve Scheiblaue (SAC member), Rob Chatham (SAC member), Richard Parrish, Sean Van Sommerin, Chris Tancousky, and MBNMS staff Karen Grimmer, Rikki Dunsmore, and Sophie De Beukelaer. The meeting was constructive and benefited from the diverse participation.

PG&E proposed seismic testing

The CWG discussed the proposed PG&E study at Diablo Canyon and concluded with a position that the seismic testing should be postponed and not take place in 2012. The CWG is gravely concerned about both lethal and non-lethal effects of the testing on a wide suite of marine life that travels through Sanctuary waters. Furthermore, we question whether the proposed study is necessary and what potential outcomes would result based on the study findings. The proposed project is only a few weeks away, and the proposed project seems to be changing rapidly. A more deliberate public process fully evaluating various alternatives would be necessary before rushing to complete permitting and testing in 2012. We encourage the SAC to weigh in on the various concerns and communicate to the Superintendent our recommendation for postponement of the seismic testing.

Forage Species

The CWG discussed the possible next steps for the Forage white paper. We recommend the SAC forward a package to the Superintendent including forage white paper, the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force report, and comments received from Scheiblaue/Parrish. We are not asking for endorsement or approval of the Forage white paper by the SAC at this time. However, we recommend that the SAC provide clear guidance regarding its preferred process for handling future white papers generated by its working groups.

Based on the importance and current relevance of forage species issues to the MBNMS, we recommend the SAC draft a resolution on forage species for adoption at the December 2012 SAC meeting that includes the following general components:

- Findings of importance of forage species in the MBNMS to ecosystem and importance of historical fishing community
- Recognize key steps that have been taken toward EBM by fishery managers
- Establish an overarching policy statement on the issues to be considered when managing forage species (e.g., move toward ecosystem-based management; account for the ecosystem services rendered by forage species to respective predators, overall ecosystem, and multiple economic sectors)
- Support for PFMC motion to prohibit new fisheries on forage species
- Support for California Fish and Game Commission's draft policy on forage species
- Identify key scientific needs and priorities related to forage species
- Identify key recommended actions the Sanctuary can take moving forward (e.g., identifying key foraging areas within the context of Ecologically Significant Areas)
- Promote Sanctuary engagement with fishery managers on forage species

CWG members would be willing to participate in a sub-committee or working group to draft such a resolution.

Ecologically Significant Areas

The CWG received a presentation by MBNMS staff Sophie De Beukelaer, Rikki Dunsmore, and Karen Grimmer on benthic-focused Ecologically Significant Areas within the Sanctuary. The CWG is strongly supportive of this effort as it will provide a solid scientific basis for engagement in the federal Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat 5-year review and other issues. Given current timelines, the CWG recommends the MBNMS release the draft document containing the Sanctuary's proposed criteria, methodology, and a map of identified Ecologically Significant Areas for public review and review by SAC and its working groups as soon as possible.

The CWG acknowledges the constructive presence of commercial and recreational fishing SAC members, and the helpful advice and engagement from the SAC chair, and invites SAC members and other interested parties to attend future CWG meetings.