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Title: PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC
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AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIGHT

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DATE: October 6, 2020

SUBJECT:

**PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION REGIONAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES TO INFORM SUSTAINABLE
AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIGHT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At the December 8, 2015, Board meeting, staff provided an overview of aquaculture; its potential benefits and opportunities for the District and the San Diego region; and provided a preview of next steps to advance development of aquaculture. Since 2015, the District has been conducting studies, planning, and completing pre-development work to support and inform aquaculture opportunities in and around San Diego Bay. Specifically, the District has been working closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), Coastal Aquaculture Siting and Sustainability Program (CASSP). The initial work focused on using coastal marine spatial planning tools to conduct exclusion, suitability, and an opportunity analyses to inform future aquaculture potential with a focus on shellfish and seaweed.

At the April 9, 2019 Board meeting, Dr. James Morris, senior ecologist at NOAA, NCCOS provided an overview of this work, and a preview of NOAA and the Department of the Interior's, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) OceanReports Tool, a web-based interactive tool for ocean planning and mapping. Since then, the NOAA, NCCOS team has been using the results of the constraints and opportunity analyses to conduct a follow-on study to evaluate potential interactions of aquaculture and sensitive habitats in and around San Diego Bay.

In addition to NOAA's planning work specific to the District, NOAA-NCCOS has conducted siting

analyses for other aquaculture operations in California and throughout the Nation. More recently, NOAA selected federal waters off southern California and the Gulf of Mexico to evaluate as the first two of ten Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOA), per directives outlined in “Executive Order 13921 on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth,” issued on May 7, 2020, by President Donald Trump. (Attachment A). NOAA envisions each AOA as a small defined geographic area that will be evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture. AOAs are anticipated to provide a stronger platform to evaluate environmental benefits and data-driven analysis of sustainable aquaculture development at a holistic level, while allowing greater synergy with stakeholders and building stronger communities of interest.

Dr. Morris and Diane Windham, California’s Aquaculture Coordinator with NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region and the Office of Aquaculture will provide an overview of the analyses conducted specific to the District as well as an update on regional planning activities to inform sustainable aquaculture development in the southern California Bight.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a presentation on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration regional planning activities to inform sustainable aquaculture development in the southern California Bight.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This presentation and update has no fiscal impact on the District.

COMPASS STRATEGIC GOALS:

Advancing the Blue Economy directly aligns with the District’s core mission and with the Public Trust Doctrine and Port Act for the promotion of commerce, navigation, fisheries, recreation and environmental stewardship. This agenda item supports the following Strategic Goal(s).

- A Port with a healthy and sustainable bay and its environment.
- A Port with a comprehensive vision for Port land and water uses integrated to regional plans.
- A Port that is a safe place to visit, work and play.
- A financially sustainable Port that drives job creation and regional economic vitality.

DISCUSSION:

Aquaculture is a growing opportunity for new environmental and economic business development in Southern California. This opportunity is being driven nationally by the need to support the development of a sustainable domestic marine aquaculture industry. Currently, only three percent of domestically produced seafood comes from aquaculture and nearly seven percent from fisheries. The remaining amount that Americans consume is imported, half of which is already produced from aquaculture. In economic terms, this contributes to an annual \$16.8 billion national seafood industry trade deficit. In environmental terms, the carbon footprint or energy used to import seafood far exceeds the energy required to harvest and deliver seafood in and to United States seafood markets. Seafood is a critical source of protein for Americans and it is clear the domestic seafood trade deficit is not only unsustainable but presents a serious food security issue. In California alone, the current

demand for seafood based on per capita consumption exceeds 600 million pounds annually, an opportunity which represents nearly \$6 billion in total economic benefit, if California could harvest this through sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. In agricultural terms, California already supports the fifth largest economy in the world, which can and should be bolstered by supporting sustainable fisheries as well as the development of a sustainable, domestic marine aquaculture industry.

While there is a clear food production component to this demand, aquaculture offers multiple co-benefits, such as fisheries enhancement, ecosystem restoration, bioremediation, carbon sequestration, mitigation banking, habitat enhancement and otherwise improving water quality and ecosystem productivity.

Since 2015, the District has been conducting studies, planning and completing pre-development work to support and inform potential aquaculture opportunities including:

- Coastal marine spatial planning to inform future development for aquaculture
- Habitat interactions analyses of aquaculture species and gear types
- Baywide feasibility study to assess landside infrastructure capable of supporting aquaculture
- Research to support the development of permit ready infrastructure

The District has been working with NOAA-NCCOS-CASSP using various marine spatial planning tools and an ecosystem approach to build an aquaculture geodatabase, a foundation of existing data layers that forms the basis of exclusion, suitability, and opportunity analyses for aquaculture in and around San Diego Bay. An exclusion analysis identifies the greatest constraints from each data layer theme and removes areas from consideration that would prevent successful aquaculture development. The result is a more concise map that highlights all the usable area within and surrounding San Diego Bay, minimizing conflict with other public trust uses and has suitable conditions for economically and environmentally beneficial aquaculture operations, and provides the base for the opportunity analysis.

Using the results of species and gear types from the opportunity analysis then allows for a more focused analysis of potential interactions of those species and gear types on sensitive habitat. An ecosystem approach to aquaculture requires the application of marine spatial planning and other techniques to ensure equitable shared use of natural resources. Long term sustainability requires adequate and consistent environmental conditions and compatible interactions with other users over space and time. Finding the right balance for aquaculture will be critical to maintaining a resilient Port infrastructure, while also balancing ecosystem needs and tradeoffs.

The District is one of the first U.S. Ports to conduct these analyses for multiple aquaculture species and associated gear types in the United States. Planning for future uses and activities in and around San Diego Bay helps ensure sustainable ecosystems remain, and that future activities do not substantially affect sensitive habitats, protected species, or other important ocean uses.

Finally, Ports can and are increasingly playing a critical role in sustainable aquaculture development given their familiarity and expertise in the permitting and entitlement process for a variety of coastal and ocean uses, the unique role they often play as landlord, operator and/or regulator, and as champions of the blue economy. As the state-legislated trustee of tidelands and submerged waters of San Diego Bay, developing sustainable domestic aquaculture assists helps in fulfilling the District's public trust responsibility to promote fisheries and commerce, as well as aligning with its mission to

enhance and protect the environment. The District is now taking an active leadership role in the expanding domestic aquaculture industry by working closely with state and federal agencies to identify pathways for facilitating early development of regional marine aquaculture projects.

General Counsel's Comments:

The Office of the General Counsel has reviewed and approved this agenda, as presented, as to form and legality.

Environmental Review:

This informational presentation to the Board does not constitute a “project” or an “approval” of a “project” under the definitions set forth in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15352 and 15378 because no direct or indirect changes to the physical environment would occur. CEQA requires that the District adequately assess the environmental impacts of its projects. Any project developed as a result of Board’s direction that requires the District or the Board’s approval, including without limitation District proposed legislation or a request for funding will be analyzed in accordance with CEQA prior to such approval. CEQA review may result in the District, in its sole and absolute discretion, requiring implementation of mitigation measures, adopting an alternative, including without limitation, a “no project alternative” or adopting a Statement of Overriding Consideration, if required. The current Board item in no way limits the exercise of this discretion. Therefore, no further CEQA review is required.

In addition, this Board item complies with Section 87 of the Port Act, which allows for the establishment, improvement, and conduct of a harbor, and for the construction, reconstruction, repair, maintenance, and operations of wharves, docks, piers, slips, quays, and all other works, buildings, facilities, utilities, structures, and appliances incidental, necessary, or convenient, for the promotion and accommodation of commerce and navigation. The Port Act was enacted by the California Legislature and is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine. Consequently, the proposed project is consistent with the Public Trust Doctrine.

Finally, this Board item does not allow for “development,” as defined in Section 30106 of the California Coastal Act, or “new development,” pursuant to Section 1.a. of the District’s Coastal Development Permit (CDP) Regulations because it will not result in, without limitation, a physical change, change in use or increase the intensity of uses. Therefore, issuance of a Coastal Development Permit or exclusion is not required. However, the District’s projects require processing under the District’s CDP Regulations. If a project is formulated as a result of Board’s direction, the Board will consider approval of the project and any improvements associated after the appropriate documentation under District’s CDP Regulations has been completed and authorized by the Board, if necessary. The Board’s direction in no way limits the exercise of the District’s discretion under the District’s CDP Regulations.

Equal Opportunity Program:

Not applicable.

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Attachment(s):

Attachment A: Executive Order on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and
Economic Growth, May 7, 2020