



Legislation Text

File #: 2018-0546, **Version:** 1

DATE: April 9, 2019

SUBJECT:

PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, NATIONAL CENTERS FOR COASTAL OCEAN SCIENCE'S EXCLUSION AND OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS FOR AQUACULTURE IN AND AROUND SAN DIEGO BAY

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 work has focused on using coastal marine spatial planning tools to conduct exclusion, suitability, and opportunities analyses to inform future aquaculture potential in and around San Diego Bay.

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. This presentation, led by Dr. James Morris, senior ecologist at NOAA, NCCOS will provide overview of methods used and an example of preliminary siting opportunities for various shellfish and macroalgae culture species, with consideration given to spatial use conflicts, gear thresholds, and biophysical needs. It is important to note that these analyses are preliminary and a first step towards gauging the potential for shellfish and macroalgae aquaculture in and around San Diego Bay. It establishes the foundation for future research needs, and has aided in defining useable space. The combination of exclusion, suitability and opportunity analyses will allow the Port to make informed decisions regarding the greatest opportunities for marine aquaculture in and around San Diego Bay.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a presentation and update on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's exclusion and opportunities analysis for aquaculture in and around San Diego Bay.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This presentation and update has no fiscal impact.

COMPASS STRATEGIC GOALS:

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 business development in Southern California. The aquaculture opportunity is being driven by the need to support development of sustainable domestic marine aquaculture industry. The U.S. currently imports over 91 percent of the seafood it consumes. In economic terms, these imports consistently contribute to over a \$14 billion domestic seafood trade deficit each year. Globally, 50 percent of seafood produced comes from aquaculture. Domestically, only three percent of seafood produced is from aquaculture. While there is a clear food production component to this demand, aquaculture offers multiple co-benefits, such as fisheries enhancement, ecosystem restoration, mitigation banking, bio-fuel/medical purposes, bioremediation, and education and outreach.

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
- 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. An ecosystem approach to aquaculture requires the application of marine spatial planning 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.

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 helps fulfill 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 to form and legality.

Environmental Review:

This 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. If a project is formulated and CEQA review is conducted, the Board reserves its discretion to adopt any and all feasible mitigation measures, alternatives to the project, including a no-project alternative, a statement of overriding considerations, if applicable, and may approve or disapprove the project and any permits or entitlements necessary for the same. Those decisions may be exercised in the sole and absolute discretion of the Board. Based on the totality of the circumstances and the entire record, this presentation does not commit the District to a definite course of action prior to CEQA review being conducted. No further action under CEQA is required at this time.

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, these items do 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 CDP 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 these items, the Board will consider approval of the project 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.

PREPARED BY:

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