

MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioner Sklar and Commissioner Silva

March 6, 2018 Meeting Summary

4. Department presentation of proposed collaborative strategy for purple sea urchin removal to support kelp recovery, and possible recommendation. Dr. Cynthia Catton gave a presentation on approaches being explored to support kelp restoration through a broad coalition of partners. The Department proposes to use recreational harvest as part of a multi-pronged and coordinated approach toward kelp recovery on the north coast. Specifically, it will recommend increasing the recreational daily limit from the current 35 purple urchins to 5-20 gallons per day in Sonoma and Mendocino counties only, through an emergency action scheduled for April. Public Discussion Comments focused on types of intervention that may support kelp recovery, which generally fell into three categories: Recreational take, commercial take, and kelp restoration and research removal.

- Recreational take: Recreational divers were concerned that the limit proposed by the Department would be too small to make an impact and suggested no daily limit. They expressed a willingness to coordinate efforts and contribute to data needs.
- Commercial take: Some commenters suggested that increasing sea urchin commercial limits would have more of an impact than increasing sport fishing limits. The Department stated that commercial divers do not have a limit on purple urchin, however they are not lucrative because the urchins are lacking gonads. A commenter responded that new uses such as making commercial fertilizer from purple urchins could offer an alternative product.
- Kelp restoration and research removals: Attention was brought to the massive macro algae cultivation plans in other parts of the world that advocate for kelp farms in California on the order of thousands of acres. The Bay Foundation in Santa Monica reported that it has returned 44 acres back to kelp forests and offered support. A representative from Reef Check highlighted that purple urchin overabundance and kelp loss are not restricted geographically to Sonoma and Mendocino counties. He presented data from sample sites in the Monterey area that have become urchin barrens, and would like to restore these areas. The Department noted that most of the highlighted areas are within marine protected areas (MPAs). There is a provision in the law for restoration within MPAs; however, there are not well-defined goals/criteria to support this broadly. A scientific collecting permit is required. MRC Recommendation Support the proposed regulation change to temporarily increase recreational harvest of purple sea urchin through emergency action in April, as recommended by the Department.