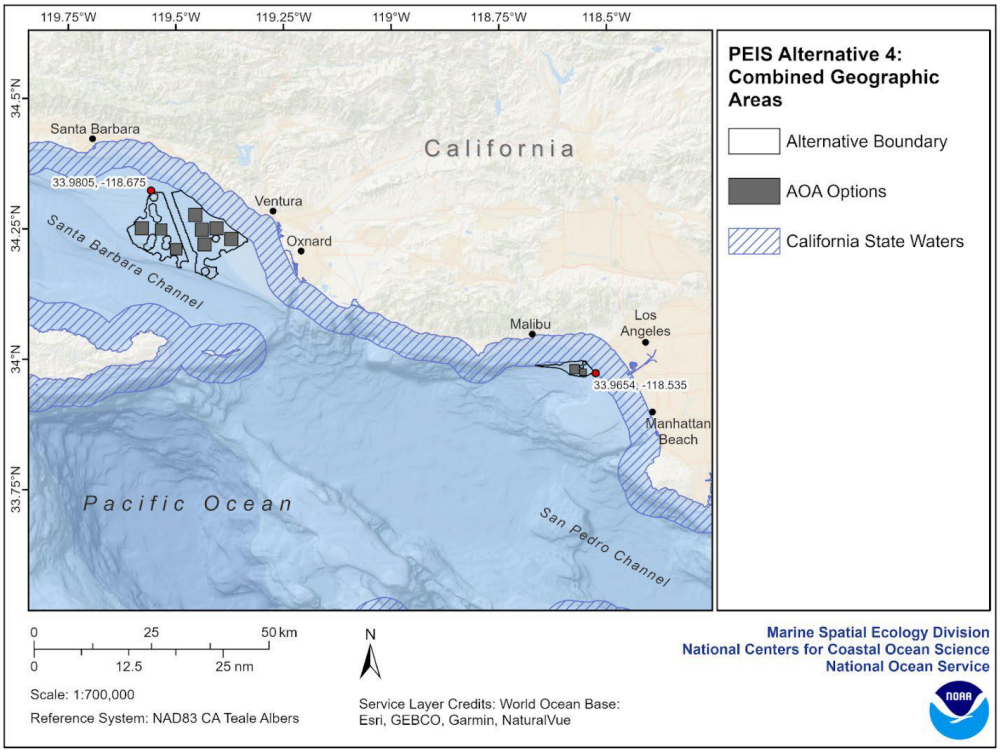
MARINE PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING ISSUES

The Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Marine Planning Committee (MPC) held a virtual meeting on October 31, 2025, for updates and discussion on several topics and to prepare a report for Council consideration. The meeting agenda, materials, and recording can be found on the meeting webpage. This report summarizes the presentations from that meeting and provides additional information.

Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (FPEIS) – Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs)

On September 19, 2025 NOAA published the FPEIS identifying 10 AOAs in Federal waters off Southern California. NOAA chose Alternative 4b, which would allow shellfish, macroalgae, finfish, or multi-species aquaculture, as it best meets the directives of EO 13921 (May 2020) and the purpose and need of the proposed action.[1] The 10 discrete locations are replicated below: Eight (8) off Ventura/Santa Barbara and two (2) others within Santa Monica Bay. The MPC expressed its appreciation for the lengthy and thorough public process that preceded the publication of the FPEIS.



[1] The Decision document for the FPEIS is available here - Decision Document for the Identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) in U.S. Federal Waters off of Southern California Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

The HC and the MPC drafted a Council comment letter to submit on the DPEIS that was transmitted to NOAA on February 24, 2025. Some of the items included in the PFMC's comment letter covered topics deemed to be outside the scope of this PEIS – e.g. broodstock sourcing, natural disasters and force majeure events. It is envisioned those would be considered in project-specific NEPA, as appropriate. Appendix 6 of the FPEIS provides NOAA's responses to public comments received.

As a result of the ongoing government shutdown, NOAA was unable to attend the MPC meeting to discuss the FPEIS. In their absence, the MPC was briefed on the FPEIS by Mike Conroy. The FPEIS provides a programmatic-level NEPA assessment of the potential impacts on the human environment associated with proposed identification of an AOA or AOAs in Federal waters off the coast of Southern California. While this FPEIS analyzes some potential impacts of siting aquaculture facilities within the AOAs, it does not propose any avoidance, minimization, mitigation, or monitoring measures for specific facilities but does discuss possible mitigation and best management practices to be considered in project-specific evaluations. Future proposed aquaculture projects may tier from the FPEIS if the lead agency determines the FPEIS is appropriate for its needs. Siting considerations within an AOA may require additional analysis to determine the suitability for specific types of aquaculture and/or cultivation approaches, and to determine any mitigation measures. Potential impacts associated with future aquaculture operations that may be sited in an AOA would be context and location-specific, and dependent on the proposed activity.

Table ES-1 (Summary and Comparison of Potential Impacts among Alternatives) of the FPEIS provides an excellent synthesis of the potential impacts for each alternative on the 22 Resource Areas analyzed. The presentation provided to the MPC outlines key changes to the FPEIS as a result of comments submitted on the DPEIS. The recording is available on the MPC meeting webpage.

AOAs – What (and Who) is Next

The next opportunity for the Council to engage is when there are specific projects proposed. In December of last year, Ocean Rainforest applied for a permit through the Army Corps of Engineers (Public notice application for permit ocean rainforest commercial-scale kelp aquaculture project) to operate a Commercial-Scale Kelp Aquaculture Project in one of the areas that was identified as an AOA. It is possible there is further action on this Application before your March 2026 meeting.

The Army Corps will likely be the lead Federal Agency for any projects proposed within an AOA. Other Federal Agencies who play a cooperating, or other, role include EPA, NMFS, USFWS, DOD, USCG, and the FDA. The lead State Agency is expected to be the California Coastal Commission with assistance from CDFW and CDPH/OEHHA. It is also expected that necessary Tribal consultations will take place.

In June of this year, NOAA published a *Guide to Leasing, Permitting, and Authorizing Commercial Aquaculture Operations off the California Coast* that addresses permitting and authorization processes for aquaculture operations within California state waters and operations proposed in federal waters off the coast of California.

The MPC recommends the Council task the Habitat Committee and MPC with monitoring potential project proposals within the AOAs and if necessary, collaborate on a potential

Council comment letter during any applicable public comment period. Depending on the timing of such proposals, it may necessitate utilizing the Quick Response Process.

BOEM's Eleventh National Oil and Gas Leasing Program

During your September meeting, the Habitat Committee (HC) Reported on BOEM's efforts to initiated a new five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program). Included within that Report are links to letters submitted by the states of Washington, Oregon and California, in response to BOEM's April 30, 2025 Request For Information in the Federal Register. All three states stated their opposition to any new leasing program off their coasts.

The Program will outline a five-year schedule for potential oil and gas lease sales on the OCS. The map below depicts the 27 planning areas – including 3 locations off California and a combined Oregon and Washington Planning Area.



Steps in the BOEM National OCS Program Development Process are as follows:

1. Requests for information and comment (RFI) from all stakeholders regarding all 27 planning areas - 45-day Comment Period (*Closed on June 16, 2025*)
2. **Draft Proposed Program (DPP) - 60-day Comment Period**
3. Proposed Program – 90-day Comment Period
4. Proposed Final Program (PFP) – 60-day waiting period
5. Approval

The next step in the BOEM process would be the publication of the DPP. The DPP had not been published before the MPC met on October 31.

The MPC recommends the Council task the Habitat Committee and MPC with monitoring developments on the DPP and if necessary, collaborate on a potential Council comment letter

during the 60-day public comment period. Depending on when the DPP is published, it may necessitate utilizing the Quick Response Process.

National Academies of Sciences (NAS) Study

The National Defense Authorization Act (FY 2023) included a provision requiring a Study on Impacts on Shipping and Commercial, Tribal and Recreational Fisheries from Development of Renewable Energy on West Coast. The NAS convened a committee to prepare the Study. The committee's work is in the process of being completed and will be sent out for review sometime in early November. Mike Conroy, Steve Joner. and Michelle Conrad were all part of the committee that drafted the study/report. The Final Study is expected to be published in early 2026 and the NAS may want to brief the Council on the document.

California Updates

The MPC was notified of a November 13 virtual workshop to be held by the California Energy Commission (CEC) on Assembly Bill 3 - Offshore Wind Seaport Readiness. The purpose of the workshops was to inform the CEC's development of a plan for seaport readiness for offshore wind development, which is due in December of 2026. The workshops featured panels and presentations on seaport readiness, maritime co-use, economic and workforce opportunities, tribal benefits, community benefits, and funding and financing strategies.

The California Offshore Wind Energy Fisheries Working Group met for the final time November 4 – 5, to finish the Statewide Strategy for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating impacts to fishing and fisheries. The strategy will prioritize fishery productivity, viability, and long-term resilience, and fairly and reasonably compensate persons engaged in the commercial and recreational fishing industries and tribal fisheries for economic impacts to ocean fisheries resulting from offshore wind energy projects. It is expected the California Coastal Commission will receive the document during the first half of next year.

Oregon Updates

Oregon Executive Order (EO) 25-25

On October 6, 2025, Gov, Tina Kotek signed Executive Order 25-25 (EO 25-25) Accelerating Wind and Solar Energy Development in Advance of Elimination of Federal Clean Energy Tax Credits. EO 25-25 directs Oregon state agencies, boards, and commissions to accelerate the permitting, siting, and approval processes for renewable energy projects (particularly wind and solar) to help Oregon meet its clean energy and climate goals. The EO's main purpose is to ensure that renewable energy projects can begin construction by July 4, 2026, allowing them to qualify for federal clean energy tax credits. To achieve this, state agencies are instructed to prioritize and streamline reviews, use all tools available under existing law, and coordinate across agencies to remove unnecessary delays. EO 25-25 emphasizes that expanding clean energy is essential to combat climate change, strengthen Oregon's energy independence, and support local economies. The EO calls for agencies to work collaboratively with communities, businesses, tribal governments, and stakeholders to ensure that renewable energy development is both rapid and responsible, balancing environmental protection with the urgency of the climate crisis.

Oregon Executive Order 25-26

Governor Kotek issued Executive Order No. 25-26 on October 21, which directs the state to accelerate climate protections for lands and waters. State agencies will need to integrate climate resilient strategies into existing programs to deliver benefits for both communities and ecosystems, according to the press release. The EO requires natural resource agencies to prioritize long-term, effective conservation when planning and implementing programs and partnerships. It sets a key goal: to protect, conserve, connect, or restore 10% of Oregon's lands and waters within ten years, using 2025 as the baseline year. An inter-agency team will first establish this 2025 baseline by identifying existing conservation efforts and defining what actions will count toward the 10% goal. Once the baseline is set, agencies will track progress toward the 2035 target. The EO also emphasizes collaboration with tribal nations, landowners, communities, NGOs, businesses, and other governments to achieve these conservation and climate resilience goals.

Oregon Offshore Wind Energy Roadmap Updates (HB 4080 and HB 3963)

Following the passage of House Bill 4080 in 2024, the State of Oregon has been developing an Oregon Offshore Wind Energy Roadmap to guide how the state will respond to and manage potential future offshore wind energy projects. The Offshore Wind (OSW) Roadmap Roundtable, coordinated by the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), reconvened in September to review and refine the first draft.

As part of this process, DLCD is engaging directly with fishing communities to understand potential impacts of offshore wind projects on fisheries, including both direct and indirect effects. DLCD is also gathering input on policies, actions, and engagement strategies that could strengthen Oregon's future review of offshore wind proposals.

Offshore Wind Energy Roadmap Coordinator Jeff Burright attended the MPC meeting to give an update on the Oregon OSW Roadmap drafting process. A second draft OSW Roadmap is expected to be released November 10 for comment from the Oregon OSW Roundtable review when it meets November 18 in North Bend. A final Oregon OSW Roadmap draft is planned to be released for public review in January/February 2026 with a 45-day comment period. DLCD expressed interest in input from the MPC and the Council over winter or during the comment period after the public draft is available, which may overlap with the March Council meeting.

Given the timing of these draft releases, the MPC has identified the following pathways for the Council to provide input and seeks guidance from the Council on next steps::

1) The MPC hosts a webinar prior to the March meeting to review and provide written feedback on the public draft Oregon OSW Roadmap at the March 2026 PFMC meeting;

2) DLCD hosts a webinar prior to the March meeting to incorporate feedback from interested PFMC and advisory body members prior to the release of the public draft in January/February 2026, at which time the MPC can review and provide feedback; and

3) The MPC drafts a report to DLCD appreciating the transparent process being employed to develop the Roadmap and requesting any process to identify potential suitable sea space for offshore wind be equally transparent.

The final version of the Oregon OSW Roadmap will be submitted to the Legislature in mid-to-late summer 2026. This timeline was extended by HB 3963 in 2025, which allowed more time to ensure thorough development and stakeholder input.

Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC)

In June 2024, the Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC) directed the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to synthesize existing research related to OSW energy development, identify key knowledge gaps, and prioritize research needs to support adaptive management for the offshore wind authorization process. STAC is developing a research prioritization framework to guide future research and monitoring, and to refine and prioritize research and monitoring needs specific to Oregon's offshore wind development. OPAC met virtually on October 29, 2025, where an update was provided on STAC's progress to date on this charge (see OPAC webpage for slide deck and meeting recording).

PacWave Site Updates

PacWave is operated by Oregon State University and consists of two wave energy test sites off Newport https://pacwaveenergy.org/:

PacWave North supports non-grid-connected tests of short-term partial-scale wave energy devices and serves as a monitoring location for oceanographic conditions as well as habitat surveys. Many research moorings were removed in October, but a Met-ocean (FLOATr) buoy and a Spotter wave buoy will remain in place over the winter. These buoys are lighted and charted as private aids to navigation. Mariners can refer to NOAA nautical charts for details.

PacWave South is a grid-connected open-ocean wave energy test site featuring four berths spread across two square nautical miles, each with its own approximately 12-mile transmission and data cable to shore. Construction of PacWave South began in June of 2021 and was completed in March of 2025. Testing of full-scale wave energy devices is expected to begin in early 2026. Mariners are advised to avoid the area where surface and seafloor monitoring equipment will be deployed through December 2025. The surface buoys in this area have yellow hulls and flashing amber lights. For navigational details, see the U.S. Coast Guard Local Notice to Mariners (LNM 13-42-2025).

Sea Grant Port Development Discussion re: Offshore Wind

The MPC was notified of an Oregon and California Sea Grant discussion on Port Development in Practice: Perspectives from Humboldt Bay. This in person meeting was scheduled to be held on November 14 at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay. The discussion was planned to focus on the proposed Humboldt Bay Offshore Wind Heavy Lift Marine Terminal project, including its purpose and scope. The discussion would highlight community, Tribal, and environmental considerations from Humboldt's ongoing experience, offering lessons and perspectives that could help participants prepare for potential future port development in Coos Bay and along the West Coast.

Washington updates

The Washington Coastal Marine Advisory Council (WCMAC) continues to track ocean policy, planning, and management issues on the state's Pacific coast. Recent activities being considered

include economic resilience of coastal communities, including the possible formation of a subcommittee to look at that topic. The next WCMAC meeting is scheduled for Dec. 3, 2025.

A proposal was recently submitted for up to six cables to land in the Grayland area. A contractor for the proposal has been engaging with folks about potential landing sites and cable routes. It is expected the first cables could be installed as early as 2028, with future connections to the same landing site as early as 2029. The WCMAC is seeking more detail on the project and may receive an update at its December meeting.

Tribal updates

Tribes dependent on the ocean for fishing or other natural resources use continue to push state, Federal and Tribal agencies to do any and all necessary research before additional offshore wind projects are restarted or sited off the West Coast.

West Coast Ocean Alliance Updates

West Coast Ocean Alliance Executive (WCOA) Director John Hansen provided a brief update on WCOA's recent work. Hansen noted that:

- Lilah Ise, formerly with NMFS, has been hired as the new project manager for WCOA;
- WCOA is publishing a request for proposals soon for a contractor to produce a Needs Assessment around a Cumulative Impacts report to determine what regional needs are surrounding existing and emerging ocean uses. WCOA would not be developing the impacts assessment itself, just identifying the needs related to it regarding other ocean uses and informing future work;
- WCOA is working with California Ocean Science Trust and Oregon Ocean Science Trust on priorities for an Ocean Action Agenda. In other words, where science needs are being defined and where more needs must be met; and
- WCOA is still working on the West Coast Ocean Health dashboard that will work to incorporate an initial set of six indicators related to tracking ocean health, including kelp, harmful algal blooms, etc.

Recommendations

As stated above, the MPC recommends that the Council:

1) **Task the Habitat Committee (HC) and MPC with monitoring potential project proposals within the AOAs and if necessary, collaborate on a potential Council comment letter during any applicable public comment period.**

2) **Task the HC and MPC with monitoring developments on the DPP and if necessary, collaborate on a potential Council comment letter during the 60-day public comment period.**

In both cases, the Council's Quick Response Process may be required, depending on the timing of activities and comment periods.

PFMC
11/4/2025