



NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

March 11, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.1

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
pblank@newportbeachca.gov
(949) 270-8158

TITLE: The Interesting Story of the Newport Harbor Kelp

ABSTRACT:

Captain Nancy Caruso, Marine Biologist and Founder of Get Inspired will provide information on the story of how kelp in Newport Harbor came to be, its interesting story and how it is being studied by USC and others as a possible savior for California's kelp forests.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
2. Receive and file

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

DISCUSSION:

The Harbor Commission will receive a presentation from Captain Nancy Caruso, marine biologist, educator, and founder of Get Inspired, a Southern California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to ocean conservation, marine science education, and community-based habitat restoration.

Captain Caruso has more than two decades of experience in marine ecology, with particular expertise in nearshore reef systems, kelp forest ecology, and citizen science initiatives. She is widely recognized for her leadership in engaging coastal communities in hands-on restoration and monitoring efforts throughout Southern California, including projects focused on kelp forest recovery and marine biodiversity enhancement.

Her presentation, "*The Interesting Story of the Newport Harbor Kelp*," will provide the Commission and public with historical and scientific context regarding kelp presence within Newport Harbor, including discussion of environmental conditions that influence

kelp recruitment, growth cycles, and persistence in enclosed harbor systems. The presentation is expected to address:

- The ecological role of kelp in coastal and harbor environments;
- Factors affecting kelp establishment and survival, including water quality, circulation, temperature, and substrate conditions;
- Observations of kelp occurrence within Newport Harbor over time; and
- Opportunities for community engagement, education, and habitat stewardship.

As the Harbor Commission continues its oversight responsibilities related to water quality, dredging, eelgrass management, mooring fields, and overall harbor health, understanding the dynamics of native marine vegetation — including both eelgrass and episodic kelp recruitment — this presentation will provide valuable ecological context for policy discussions and long-term planning.

Captain Caruso's work emphasizes collaboration among scientists, local governments, harbor users, and community volunteers to advance practical, science-based conservation efforts. Her perspective will offer the Commission insight into broader coastal ecological trends while highlighting the unique characteristics of Newport Harbor's marine environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the Harbor Commission find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the Harbor Commission considers the item).