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# NEWPORT BEACH

## Harbor Commission Staff Report

March 12, 2025  
Agenda Item No. 6.1

**TO:** HARBOR COMMISSION

**FROM:** Chris Miller, Public Works Administrative Manager, 949-644-3043  
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**TITLE:** Eelgrass and Caulerpa in Newport Harbor - Update

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**ABSTRACT:**

Staff will provide an update on the status of eelgrass and Caulerpa in Newport Harbor.

**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, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.
2. Receive and file.

**DISCUSSION:**

Eelgrass is an important resource in shallow coastal environments such as Newport Harbor. Every two years, the City performs an eelgrass survey along the shoreline of Newport Harbor to support the City's October 2015 "Eelgrass Protection and Mitigation Plan for Shallow Waters in Lower Newport Bay: An Ecosystem Based Management Plan" (Plan). This Plan is a critical component to the City's Regional General Permit 54 (RGP-54) which provides a streamlined pathway for residential and commercial maintenance dredging. Consistent, biennial eelgrass surveys accurately document the acreage within the harbor. This tracking is then used to establish and validate long term trends which are then used to quantify the amount of eelgrass we could temporarily impact via dredging. In essence, these eelgrass surveys are at the core of our maintenance dredging program.

Converse to the benefits of eelgrass, the green algae Caulerpa poses a substantial threat to marine ecosystems in California particularly to the extensive eelgrass meadows and other underwater environments as found in Newport Harbor. With the recent discovery of Caulerpa in Newport Harbor in 2021 and later in San Diego Harbor, there has been a heightened awareness of this invasive species as the regulatory and resource agencies collaboratively strive towards ultimate eradication.

Staff will provide an update on the status of both eelgrass and Caulerpa in Newport Harbor so the Commission will have a general understanding of these two biological issues in the harbor.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact related to this item because it is not a project at this time.

**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, 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).