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NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

January 14, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.1

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Restoring Oysters in Newport Harbor and Commensurate Benefits

ABSTRACT:

James Ulcickas and Kaysha Kenney will provide information on their efforts and methods for restoring oyster populations in Newport Harbor. They will also discuss the benefits of these restoration efforts including support for harbor structures, water quality and water clarity.

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 City of Newport Beach Harbor Department has been engaged in collaborative efforts with community partners to promote ecological health and sustainability within Newport Harbor. One area of growing interest and research involves the restoration of native Olympia oysters (*Ostrea lurida*) as a natural means to enhance water quality, habitat diversity, and structural resilience along harbor shorelines and pilings.

Mr. James Ulcickas, founder and proprietor of Bluewater Grill Restaurants, has long championed sustainable aquaculture and marine conservation initiatives. His experience with shellfish sustainability and community education provides valuable insight into how oyster restoration can align with both environmental stewardship and public engagement.

Ms. Kaysha Kenney, representing Orange County Coastkeeper, will provide an overview of recent and ongoing oyster restoration efforts in Southern California, including

Coastkeeper's pilot programs in Upper Newport Bay and other regional estuaries. Ms. Kenney's presentation will address the ecological and structural benefits of oyster growth, including:

- Improved water clarity through natural filtration (each oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day);
- Enhanced habitat complexity supporting fish and invertebrate biodiversity;
- Bio-stabilization of shorelines and pilings, potentially reducing erosion and biofouling impacts; and
- Community engagement and education opportunities related to marine conservation.

The presentation will explore how these benefits can complement the City's goals for a clean, safe, and well-enjoyed harbor, as outlined in the Harbor Department's mission. Staff anticipates that the Commission's feedback will help guide future collaboration opportunities or pilot projects that integrate oyster restoration with existing water quality management programs, habitat enhancement efforts, and harbor maintenance practices.

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).

ATTACHMENTS:

None