

## Long-term Marine Protected Area Socioeconomic Monitoring Program for Commercial and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel Fisheries in the State of California

### Perspectives on the Health and Well-being of California's Commercial Fishing Communities in Relation to the MPA Network

#### *Members of Morro Bay - Port San Luis's Commercial Fishing Community*

The Marine Protected Area (MPA) Human Uses Project Team<sup>1</sup> anticipates hosting over 25 virtual focus group conversations with fishermen throughout California from July 2020 through Spring 2021.<sup>2</sup> The information shared during these discussions is a core component of a study to gather and communicate information about the health and well-being of commercial and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) fishing communities in California, including impacts from MPAs. A key goal of this study is to convey fishermen's perspectives about the unique challenges and opportunities that fishing communities are facing to managers and decision-makers through a series of summaries and other products. The results of this study will be made available to inform discussions about MPA and fisheries management, including California's 10-year MPA network performance review.

For each focus group, a small number of fishermen representing a range of fishing interests were brought together to:

- provide their perspectives on their fishing community's health and well-being, including environmental conditions, markets, infrastructure, and social and political relationships, including impacts from MPAs; and
- share feedback about their focus group experience to help improve the process for future focus groups.

The focus groups included quantitative questions where fishermen were asked to score their port on various topics, and an open-ended qualitative discussion followed each question. This document summarizes both quantitative and qualitative findings from the focus group. More details about the methods used for each focus group discussion, including questions asked to participants and the approach to recruiting focus group participants, is available on the Project Team's website, <https://mpahumanuses.com/>. The website also hosts focus group conversation summaries and an interactive data explorer, which will be components of the final products developed upon completion of this project in 2021. For questions about this project, including focus group engagement and the content of this document, please contact us at [hello@mpahumanuses.com](mailto:hello@mpahumanuses.com).

**Port: Morro Bay - Port San Luis**

**Date: Thursday, October 29, 2020**

**Participants: Jesse Barrios, Bill Blue, Tom Hafer, Bob Maharry**

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<sup>1</sup> Consisting of Humboldt State University researchers, Ecotrust, and Strategic Earth Consulting

<sup>2</sup> Previous versions of the summaries from other ports suggest there would be 30 focus groups through February 2021. The project has since evolved based on the needs of the fishing community and is reflected in all summaries moving forward.

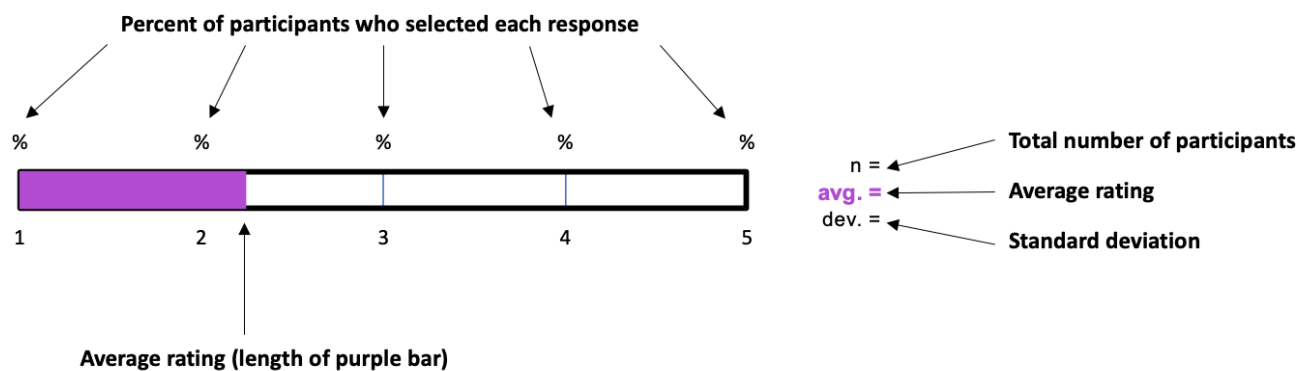
## Overview

On October 29, 2020, four commercial fishermen operating out of Morro Bay - Port San Luis participated in the eleventh focus group conversation. A detailed summary of the conversation is captured below, including:

- the numerical final scores (gathered via Zoom polls) for questions asked within each theme;
- a summary of participants' perceptions, insights, and perspectives related to each question; and
- direct quotes from participants that help to illustrate sentiments in their own words.

## Guidance for Interpreting Figures

There are 17 figures displaying participant responses for questions that had a numerical/quantitative component. In those figures, the percentages located directly above the bar (between 1 (low) and 5 (high)) represent the percent of participants in the focus group who selected that response. The total number of focus group participants is labeled 'n' to the right of each figure. The length of the purple bar indicates the average rating for each question, also labeled 'avg.' to the right, and 'dev.' refers to standard deviation or the extent to which scores deviated from one another. See below for an example figure. There are also two figures on pages 15 and 24 that display the average responses for each question in the well-being and MPA sections, respectively, from highest to lowest.



In addition to providing feedback to help refine our process and approach for future focus groups, participants requested several resources be shared with them, including:

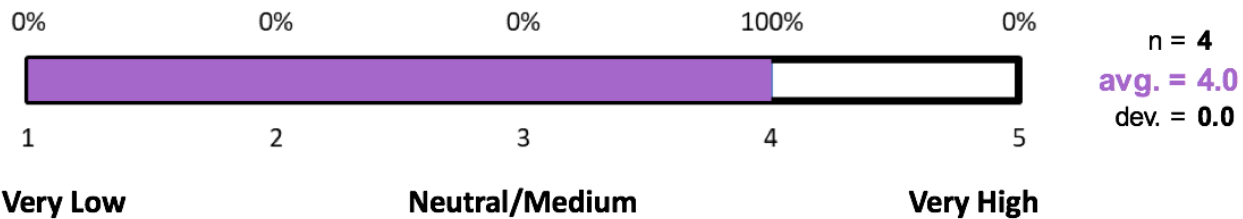
- [California Fisheries Data Explorer](#): This interactive site allows users to visualize commercial landings data (i.e., number of fishermen, pounds of fish landed, and revenue from fish landed) and CPFV logbook data (i.e., number of anglers, vessels, trips, and fish caught from specific fisheries and ports).
- [MPA Baseline Monitoring Program: Central Coast](#)
  - [Summary of Results from Baseline Monitoring of Marine Protected Areas 2007–2012, Central Coast](#)
- [Marine Protected Area Monitoring Program, 2019–2021](#)
- An article about Governor Newsom's [Executive Order related to protected areas and the 30x30 initiative](#)

Our Project Team would like to express our appreciation to the four Morro Bay - Port San Luis fishermen—Jesse Barrios, Bill Blue, Tom Hafer, and Bob Maharry—for their time and contributions to the focus group conversation.

## Perceptions of Fishing Community Well-being

### Well-Being, Environmental

**1. Marine Resource Health - Present** Overall, how would you rate the current health and sustainability of the marine resources on which fishermen from this port rely?



**Discussion Summary** Participants shared the perspective that marine resources are currently healthy and thriving.

- Several participants shared why they scored present marine resource health as ‘High,’ including decreased fishing pressure due to fishing restrictions and less participation in the California commercial fishing industry, and a perceived reduction of debris and trash in the ocean.
- One fisherman shared they see many bait fish and marine mammals, which they believe indicates a healthy environment. Another fisherman stated they are now seeing new fish species, specifically rockfish.
  - One participant perceived that the Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) have successfully improved rockfish populations, so much so that areas accessible to fishing are overpopulated. They added that this has led fishermen to have to fish in other areas to avoid catching certain species.
- Another fisherman highlighted the need to fish closer to their home ports to make commercial fishing economically viable. However, they stated this puts additional pressure on areas that local fishermen target often.

### Participant Quotes

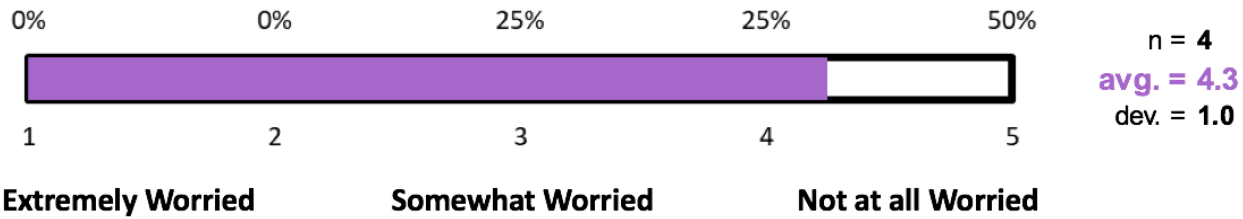
“I scored it high. I think the ocean's healthy, there's a lot of fish. The ocean is in good shape, you know, especially in California [and the] West Coast.”

“Over the last 15 years, with the different closures, restricted areas, and restricted access and a decrease in participation [in the California commercial fishing industry], what I see in my travels is the ocean's healthier than I remember it 20, 25 years ago.”

“The ocean looks healthy to me. I mean, the RCA has been closed for so long now, [there's an] abundance of rockfish in the shallows that never used to be there.”

“I think my [only] concern would be that the fisheries have changed where people have to fish really economically. So guys are fishing closer to ports. A lot of the same fishermen are kind of fishing in the same area as each other. So the common spots get picked over a little bit more. So we're worried about size, stuff like that.”

**2. Marine Resource Health - Future Concerns** Overall, how worried are fishermen from your port about the future long-term health and sustainability of the marine resource populations on which you rely?



**Discussion Summary** Participants' scores regarding the long-term health of marine resources ranged from somewhat worried to not at all worried. However, they clarified their fears were about future management and other external factors that could negatively affect marine resource health rather than concerns about the resource itself.

- Participants stated they are not worried about marine resources' future health and sustainability from a resource perspective.
- Several participants expressed concerns about future ocean development and fisheries management, identifying proposed wind farms in local waters and additional MPAs in federal waters as their primary worry. One participant suggested further limiting fishing will increase pressure on the resource in unrestricted areas.
  - One participant expressed concern about considerations to open the rockfish season to the sport sector year-round. They highlighted that the rockfish fishery is currently closed for two months to avoid fishing during the spawning season.
- Another participant shared they don't trust decision-makers to make choices that will support marine resource health into the future due to their belief that political pressures currently drive management decisions.

**Participant Quotes**

"We're not worried about the resource. We're just worried about the way it's being handled now."

"[Offshore wind] is a big concern. I don't think the science is very well settled on what the transmission lines do. I know on the East Coast, the [movement towards offshore wind] stopped because there was evidence that it was hurting spawning. So if fish can't spawn properly, or their spawning is inhibited, that's obviously not good for the resource. And just my same concerns before - the more ocean you take away where we can fish, the more concentrated people become. And then you've overstrained a resource in those areas. So that's the biggest thing, is the loss of ocean that's fishable. I think that's the biggest impact in the future."

"I'm worried about [decision-makers] putting more MPAs in federal waters. I think there are too many of them already. The [MPAs] just cause overfishing and a size limit and a quota for all the fisheries. I don't even know why they put MPAs in. It just kind of ruined everything."

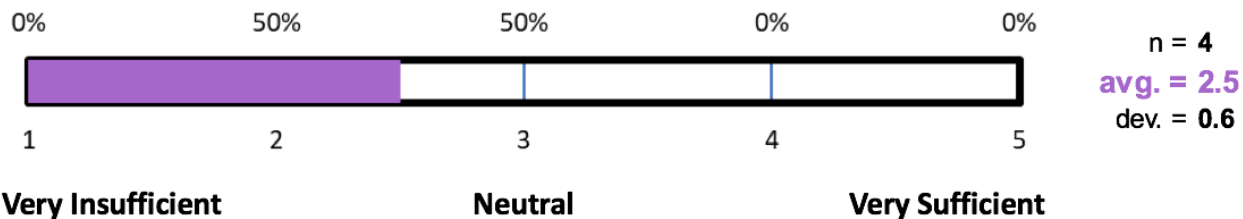
"It took a long time for [the California Department of Fish and Wildlife] to actually close the nearshore fishery for a couple of months. They closed the sportfishing seasons on rockfish for a couple of months, the peak spawning months of [the rockfishes] cycle. I fished hook-and-line rockfish for a long time. Our most productive time for fishing, this was back in the 70s, was

when the fish were spawning. [The fish] were all congregated up on the rocks. At that point, you know, there was a lot of fish. You'd get done unloading [and] the inside of the fish hold would be lined with eggs. You know, we didn't think about that at those times. It's ludicrous that [now] they want to open that fishery [for sportfishing] year-round. The only reason it [the fishery] survived and [is] thriving is because they shut it down for two months. It just doesn't... it doesn't make any sense what they're trying to do."

"Just the political climate in Sacramento, you know, we're not real cozy with what we see coming down from Sacramento with regards to how [fisheries] are being managed here. You know, you can't politicize a resource, and that's what's happening. And it's wrong."

## Well-Being, Economic

**3. Access to Harvestable Resources** Overall, how would you rate your port in terms of the level of access that fishermen have to marine resources to support the local fishing fleet?



**Discussion Summary** Participants identified several restrictions that inhibit commercial fishermen from accessing available resources, including the uncertainty of fishing seasons and other fisheries management restrictions.

- Several participants highlighted the challenges with management changes that lead to the uncertainty of fishing seasons. They stressed the importance of having the ability to access and participate in multiple fisheries year-round to be responsive to management restrictions in seasonal fisheries.
- One participant expressed there is sufficient access to becoming a commercial fisherman. However, they identified limiting factors, including costs of permits and restrictions on fishing time, specifically related to shortened seasons in the Dungeness crab fishery due to elevated risk of marine life entanglements.
  - One participant highlighted the high degree of uncertainty in the fishing season's timing and length for Dungeness crab, making it challenging to plan for a year-round fishing business that yields sufficient income.
- One participant highlighted the abundant rockfish populations that are inaccessible due to RCAs. They suggested commercial fishermen be given a quota to catch these fish. Otherwise, they believed out-of-state fishermen would target the resource.

## Participant Quotes

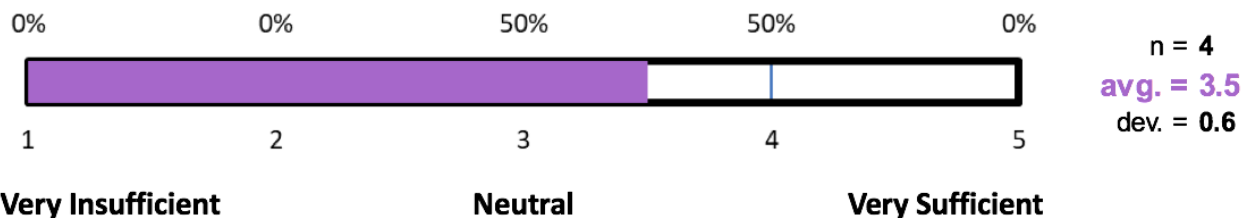
"To get into fishing nowadays, a guy can go buy a boat and do open access. That's a little bit of money, it's a little bit of fish, but it's expensive to get into fishing. I mean, you're not going to find a nearshore permit and a trap endorsement for less than \$150,000, \$200,000. Kids don't have that kind of money lying around. Dungeness crab is expensive to get in. You've got to have

a boat and you got to get the permit. And so that's a problem. You know, there's not going to be a whole bunch of new guys going fishing because it's too darn expensive to get into it."

"As far as access, the access isn't poor. A lot of it's just kind of port-specific and the dynamic of the fishermen. I think a big concern right now is regarding whale entanglement stuff, so guys are just having a hard time planning. Their seasons were cut short. So that's probably been the biggest impact for income is just the whale entanglement stuff right now and just the lack of ability to really plan because it's not really clear what's going to happen in the future."

"Between the two ports, we're small boats. And there's a lot of rock out there that [is] spread out. It wouldn't take much of a [rockfish] quota. I'm not talking 10,000 [pounds] a week, [but] you could spread [the quota] around, and it would work really [well]. And there's plenty [rockfish]. It would make a big difference [if we were allowed to access those rockfish]. I'm not talking wide open like it was. But it remains to be seen, who gets access to this fish."

**4. Income from Fishing** Overall, how would you rate the income that fishermen from your port earn from fishing in terms of supporting livelihoods?



**Discussion Summary** When discussing income from fishing, participants indicated there is an opportunity to make a sufficient living from commercial fishing. However, they reported increasing business costs make it challenging to generate revenue from fishing alone.

- One fisherman shared their perspective that fishermen generally make an income from fishing depending on the effort put into their business. However, they also recognized the fluctuations in revenue, with some years being profitable and others being less so.
  - One fisherman shared that since they have access to the permits they need and have a business model in place, they can make a good living.
  - Another fisherman explained they know commercial fishermen who have taken additional jobs outside the fishing industry to make ends meet.
  - One participant identified certain fisheries, including open access, as an option for young fishermen to get into the industry. However, they acknowledged that relying on these limited opportunities to make a living does not provide sufficient income to raise a family.
- Several fishermen stated that the rising fishing costs do not align with the price of fish, which remains static or, in some cases like the black cod market, drops to levels that result in insufficient income.
  - One participant explained how the increasing costs of fuel, bait, slip fees, and boat maintenance has directly affected their ability to generate a profitable business.
  - One participant emphasized the challenge of balancing the high costs to obtain specific fishing permits (e.g., Dungeness crab) with increasing operating costs.

- One participant stated it is expensive to participate in federal fisheries that require an observer, which adds overhead costs to each trip.

**Participant Quotes**

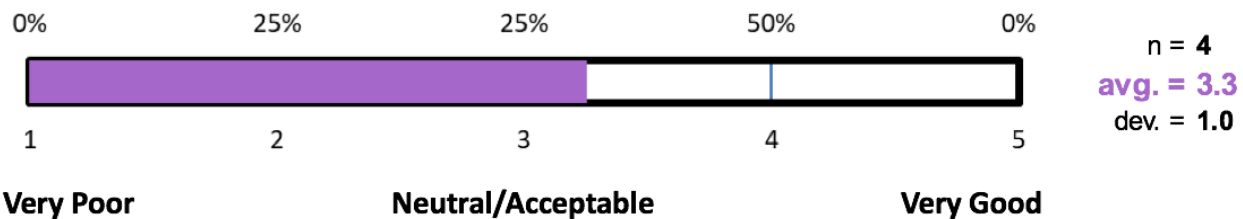
“Some years, you make a lot of money. Some years you make a medium amount of money. Some guys make the same kind of money all the time... And for a young guy, [fishing can be] a pretty good living. So, you know, it all depends how hard do you want to work and if the fish are there. But it's all fishing, so. I mean, like I said, some years, you have a good year. Some years you don't.”

“A lot of guys do have other jobs. Guys maybe will have to fish multiple fisheries. It's not like there's just one fishery that a guy can fish and kind of get through anymore.”

“What do you go fishing for as a young kid? [There are] only a couple of things around here: open access and [hagfish]. Well, the [hagfish] market tanked. That's limited. And the open access thing, [no one is] going to raise a family doing that.”

“Operating costs have gone up all the way around, you know. Whether it's your slip rent, or your insurance, or your fuel, or your bait. You know, the price of fish is up more or less. But the costs of running these boats have gone through the roof compared to a number of years ago.”

**5. Markets Overall, how would you rate the quality of the markets to which fishermen from your port are able to sell their catch?**



**Discussion Summary** Participants shared various perspectives about the diversity and quality of available markets, which differ across fisheries and between Morro Bay and Port San Luis ports.

- One participant stated there could be improvements in the diversity of local markets to increase choice and competition, which could also improve pricing. Another fisherman shared that markets are available for certain types of products in high demand (e.g., spot prawn).
  - Another fisherman communicated their frustration with the lack of local processors and markets.
  - One participant shared there has been a shift in the Morro Bay/Port San Luis area over the last few years to a fresh market fishery only. They believed this affects the black cod fishery, specifically, which has traditionally been a frozen market. In addition, they stated the ports now lack freezers and processors, which directly affects their ability to sell what they catch.
- One participant expressed concerns that there are only a few processors in the area, and it requires a lot of hard work to network within existing channels to sell their catch. In addition, they identified another challenge regarding finding a buyer willing to truck big loads outside the area (north or south).



- Another participant shared that fishermen out of Morro Bay/Port San Luis have had to fish based on the trucking schedule, which involves catching certain sized fish and a certain amount of fish to align with buyers' requirements.
- One participant believed fishermen engaged in open access fisheries conducting direct-to-consumer marketing are affecting traditional markets. As a result, the participant explained how they experienced a drop in the price per pound they receive from their buyers.

### Participant Quotes

"I think the biggest thing our port could use is definitely more markets."

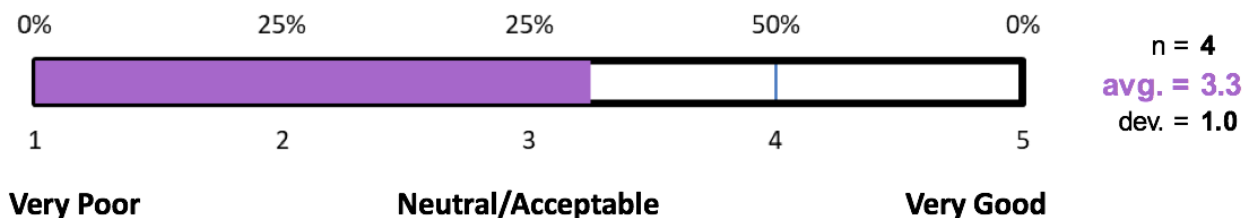
"I think for the black cod fishery, years ago, the market was extremely good. Everybody here was fishing for a frozen market. Anybody could get a market. Anybody that had a boat could sell black cod. There were a lot of boats here doing that. And when that market and the dollar value changed, [...] that frozen market went away. It wasn't that the resource was really in trouble. It was that the markets became smaller, and people fell out of it."

"Port San Luis [has] no processing at all left. We just lost our last fish market. We don't even have a farmer's market yet. So we just have extremely limited options, almost no competition. So for live fish, we have one buyer who transports most of the live fish up to the Bay Area. For hagfish, we only have one buyer. For salmon, [name redacted] will buy a certain amount. After that, guys have to call around to find other people to buy their fish. [...] It's bad for the price, it's bad for scheduling your fishing trips just because you're so dependent on meeting your truck driver, all that. [...] A lot of times [fishermen and the trucks] are on different schedules. So it just makes everything more difficult."

"We make it work. The alternative is to sell cheap just to get [the fish] off the boat. It's not good. Markets are tight. But we make it work, you know, but not everybody has the same networking ability of some of the other guys."

"What we're seeing now is a lot of people that aren't full-time fishermen that participate in the open access [fisheries]. [This] has brought a lot of hardship to traditional markets that have been around because people are selling fish out of the back of the pickup, instead of through the legitimate channels that help support the community and the infrastructure."

### 6. Infrastructure Overall, how would you rate the state of infrastructure and services that support commercial fishing in your port?



**Discussion Summary** Participants shared a range of perspectives on local infrastructure. Some participants felt the infrastructure is sufficient for the size of the Morro Bay and Port San Luis ports. Others explained the connections between infrastructure and markets.



- Several participants explained the relationship between viable markets and having the infrastructure to support those markets. They shared how the lack of volume of fish being landed and the movement toward fresh fish markets in Morro Bay/Port San Luis has an adverse effect on available infrastructure.
- Another participant expressed concerns about the lack of maintenance and repairs of the limited available infrastructure.
- One participant shared that while there has been a reduction in available and working infrastructure over time, they felt the current infrastructure, though limited, is sufficient to support commercial fishing activities out of Morro Bay.

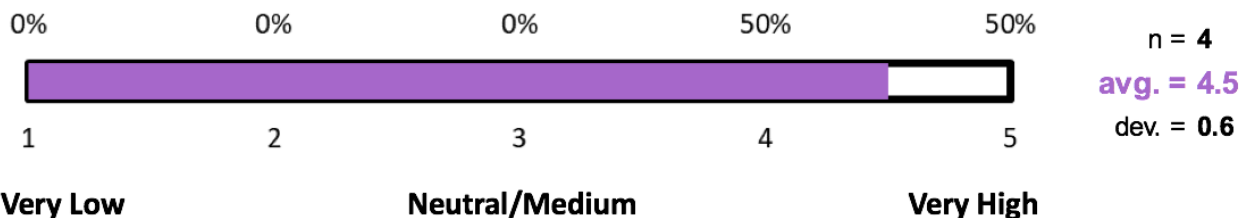
**Participant Quotes**

“Our facilities, due to lack of volume going across the docks where we are able to unload, [makes it] hard [for the port] to keep up on maintenance and repairs and whatnot.”

“What's happened over the last few years in our two areas [has been a movement to] a fresh market fishery. We don't have processors here. We don't have freezing capacity. So everything that we do goes to a fresh market, which has changed the dynamics.”

“[Morro bay has] two unloading docks. And then you also have the [out of town buyers] picking up [via trucks]. But we only have one fuel dock. But all in all, [for] Morro Bay, I think it's sufficient for us considering there's not a whole bunch of guys, you know, a lot less than there used to be.”

**7. COVID-19 Impacts** *How disruptive do you think COVID-19 has been to your port's fishing operations?*



**Discussion Summary** Participants described how COVID-19 was highly disruptive to the fisheries in Morro Bay and Port San Luis, particularly regarding markets.

- Several participants shared that fishermen in the area had been unable to sell all of their catch during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically those who relied on fresh market sales.
  - One participant indicated fresh market sales were directly affected when restaurants, a primary buyer of fresh fish, started to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, one participant highlighted that specific overseas markets shut down due to COVID-19.
  - Several participants anticipated this hardship to be temporary and were optimistic that the situation would change once restaurants reopen.
- Several participants described how COVID-19 made adjusting their fishing schedule to align with the uncertain trucking schedule detailed in the Markets and Infrastructure sections above even more complex (e.g., limited drivers, demand for product, etc.).
- During the pandemic, several participants described the changes in market conditions and buyer preferences (i.e., what fish was deemed 'sellable' by buyers). As a result, fishermen could not sell their catch, resulting in a loss of bait and product.

### Participant Quotes

"[COVID-19] was devastating. Even though it's turning around now, it did play a big part in hurting a lot of businesses early on."

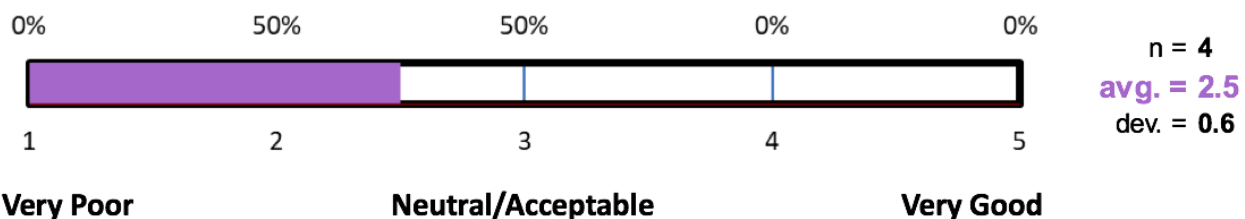
"With the onset of COVID and all the restaurants and stuff closing down, well, that's where all the fresh stuff goes. So this year, that's been a huge hit on all the fisheries that we have here locally because they all revolve around fresh markets. And [this market that] was kind of peaking a couple of years ago... we kind of got the door slammed in our face."

"COVID hit us hard because it instantly shut down the hagfish market. I think at the time, there were four boats fishing. So we ended up dumping a lot of our fish, and then a lot of our bait went bad. The live fish market pretty much shut down for us for a short amount of time just because there were no restaurants open, and the majority of our live rockfish go to the restaurants in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. So COVID hit us especially hard on that. But it seems to be rebounding a little bit."

"One of the things that we saw happen with COVID-19 was that it changed what little bit of trucking infrastructure that Morro Bay had. [...] We normally went fishing when the weather was good [...] But for my personal experience this past year, I've done things that I never envisioned that I would have to do just to survive the COVID thing. We fished to when the truck was available, not to when the weather was good. And we had buyers that [...] only wanted small fish, so in the fishery that I participate in, all the fish are live when they come to the surface. So we were throwing fish over the side that normally would have been marketable [...]. And [we] would go one trip - small fish came in, big fish went back. [On] the next trip, big fish came in, small fish went back. And if we couldn't make it work for the day that the truck was going to be there, we didn't get to go fishing. So we managed to make a year out of it, but it wasn't easy. [...] Those of us that are on this call have figured out how to survive, and that's why we're still here."

### Well-Being, Social/Political

**8. Labor/New Participants** Overall, how would you rate your port in terms of being able to recruit new entrants to the industry and being able to retain current participants?



**Discussion Summary** When discussing labor, participants expressed concerns about the lack of younger people entering the commercial fishing industry and the challenges with retaining crew members due to the industry's dynamic nature.

- Several participants described that over the past decade, there has been a decrease in fishing businesses being passed down through generations in California. Increases in permit and operations costs, coupled with an aging fleet, were identified as the primary drivers.
  - One participant expressed concerns that there appear to be few boat owners under 30 and no foreseeable skilled labor pool with the necessary training and experience in boat mechanics, electrical, etc.
  - One participant identified Alaska as a state that is investing in bringing young people into the fishing industry.
- One participant suggested using the number of fishing permits for sale to indicate the industry's ability to retain participants.
- Several participants shared it is increasingly difficult to find reliable crew members willing to work under unstable conditions related to how the fisheries are managed.
  - One participant commented they take additional time to help support good, reliable deckhands in finding better positions on other boats and fisheries that can provide them with stable, long-term jobs to help retain them in the industry.
  - One participant stated they could find crew willing to stay with the operation long-term if they can provide them with work year-round. However, another participant explained it is difficult for crew to work around the uncertainty of fishing seasons (e.g., delayed openers), particularly when crew have other non-fishing jobs they need to consider.
  - One participant shared they have struggled to find crew with the work ethic—willingness to work long hours under strenuous conditions—required to succeed in the fishing industry.

### Participant Quotes

“My biggest concern with our fishery is the lack of younger guys. We have so few guys that want to deckhand. Young guys are [un]interested in running a boat, much less owning a boat. I think it used to be more family businesses. Parents would fish, and then their kids are fishing with them, and [the kids would] get their hand on a boat or get hooked up with a boat. For some reason, [in] our ports there seems to be a generation gap [of kids that aren't] interested in fishing. So in our ports specifically in 10 years, there's going to be a lot of boats that don't have operators. I don't know where we're going to get operators.”

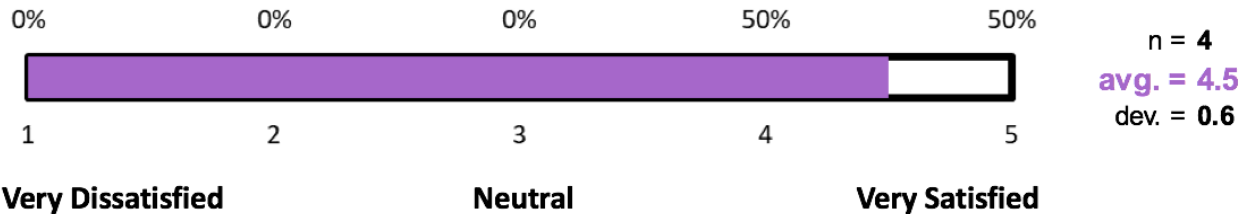
“I think the other thing is just the dynamic of fishing. It requires you to be a multifaceted person and kind of curious and interested in different things. I don't see a lot of 18 to 21 year old kids that are interested in learning new things or have a curiosity of learning electrical, mechanical, all that stuff that's required to be successful.”

“I've found good deckhands. I try to get them promoted quick, get them on nicer crab boats, try to get them on squid seiners. And I've been lucky. I've found some good guys I've passed on to real nice boats. But overall, it's the biggest thing we struggle with on our part is just finding crew guys, finding reliable guys.”

“I feel like you have to find five crew guys to find one that'll work. If you run the boat year-round, you're able to keep a better crew. But if you're intermittent at all, keeping any sort of reliable or steady people is almost impossible. I don't blame them. It's such a volatile

industry. So you have to find a weirdly specific deckhand, someone that almost enjoys the volatility and trying different fisheries and going up to Alaska for a summer and coming back [here] to fish. And we don't have a lot of [deckhands like that] here."

**9. Job Satisfaction** Overall, how satisfied do you think fishermen from the port are with their jobs in the fishing industry?



**Discussion Summary** Participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs in the fishing industry.

- Participants expressed a great deal of satisfaction and appreciation for their jobs. Several participants expressed the desire to continue fishing for as long as they are physically able to do the work.

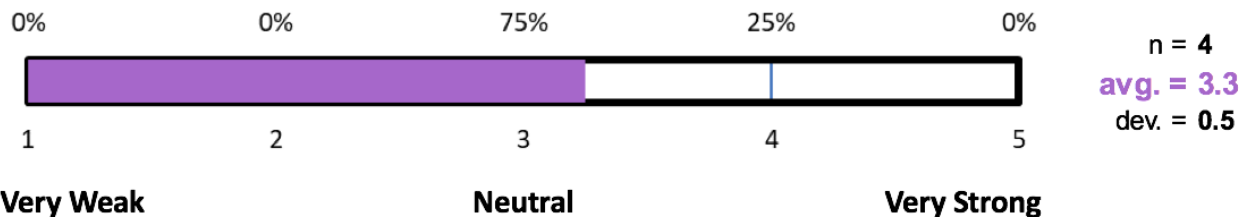
**Participant Quotes**

"I'll say I'm very satisfied that I've been able to do what I do as long as I've been able to do it. And I hope I can continue to do it."

"I like what I do. I've been doing it a long time. I'm getting a little over it now, but I'll probably fish a few more years and then call it, you know."

"I'm still real happy with what I do."

**10. Social Relationships - Internal** Overall, how would you rate the strength of social relationships (or social capital) within your port?



**Discussion Summary** Participants reflected on the generally positive relationships between fishermen in the Morro Bay/Port San Luis area while acknowledging fishermen's competitive and independent nature.

- One participant explained a small, core group of Morro Bay/Port San Luis fishermen are actively involved in local fishing associations. However, they highlighted that it is challenging to bring fishermen together as a group unless there is a crisis, which can lead to more of a unified effort.
  - One fisherman acknowledged the importance of fishing family members actively coordinating and keeping local fishermen informed of what is happening, specifically

- related to issues that may affect the fisheries (e.g., offshore wind, fiber optic cables, entanglement risk).
- One participant highlighted those fishermen who are more actively involved in fishing associations and other groups are financially affected by taking time off the water or out of the boatyard to attend meetings.
  - One participant emphasized fishermen generally lead their operations and are individualistic by nature, making it challenging to bring fishermen together to gain agreement.
    - One participant described the competitive nature of fishing and the need to be aggressive on the ocean to make a good living. This dynamic can lead to fishermen not wanting to collaborate off the water.
    - One participant explained that many fishermen are nearing retirement, making it difficult to encourage their involvement when discussing the long-term future of the fisheries.

### Participant Quotes

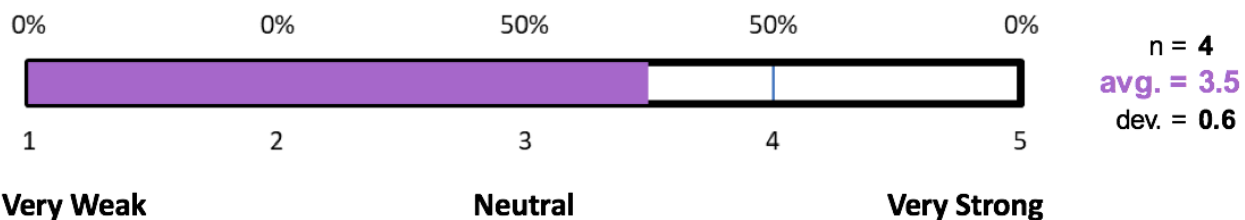
“Well, fishermen have always been very hard to get together. Usually, at times of crisis, there's a little unity or effort. But I mean, everybody gets along for the most part. It's hard to have really strong social relationships if you're in this business.”

“At the end of the day, you got this core group of guys who do the heavy lifting in every port. You got four or five of them on this phone call right now. And you got the other 85% that just talk. You got a handful of guys that when it comes down to something, we put what little differences we may or may not have aside, and we get into the room.”

“Well, Morro Bay is fortunate because we have an organization, the [Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Organization], I think since 1972 [...] Our organization is strong. I think that we have accomplished a lot of things during these last 30 years. We have nine people on our board, and everybody's well informed and enthused about, you know, about keeping the organization strong.”

“I think it's just the nature of fishermen. [Some] people that don't really want bosses. They don't want people telling them what to do. They want to be their own person. So getting these types of guys to agree on something is almost impossible.”

### 11. Social Relationships - External Overall, how would you rate the strength of the port’s relationship with external groups who could help support community needs?



**Discussion Summary** Participants believed the Morro Bay/Port San Luis area’s relationships with external, fishing-focused groups are generally successful. However, they identified opportunities to strengthen relationships with the local community, including decision-makers (e.g., city councils).

- Participants highlighted the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Organization as the primary partner or liaison in the area for external groups to work with.
- One participant believed there is a good representation of Morro Bay/Port San Luis fishermen in key external fishing groups, including the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), California Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF), Central California Joint Cable/Fisheries Liaison Committee, California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group, etc.
  - One participant shared an example of the type of negotiations they are involved in within their port, namely working to balance the need to maintain fishing opportunities and expand renewable energy options.
  - One participant expressed appreciation for the opportunity to partner with external groups, including those collaborations that channel financial support back into the ports (e.g., cable committee).
- One participant expressed concerns about the broader community’s limited awareness of the local fishing fleet and suggested the fleet improve public relations and communications with the Morro Bay/Port San Luis public.
- One participant expressed concerns about the waterfront development planned in Morro Bay and the anticipated adverse impacts this may have on the fishing community.

### Participant Quotes

“Everybody in the [Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Organization] that is a director or an officer are in contact with people all over the state. You know, the [DCTF, offshore wind, the cable committee, PCFFA, etc.]. So I think everybody's pretty connected and knows what's happening and is well informed.”

“We're fortunate because we have a Central California Joint Cable/Fisheries Liaison Committee that really helps us out with whatever we need to get every year from them, and it's quite a substantial amount of money. So I think that part of [our external relationships] is strong.”

“We have very poor public relations on our end. The community doesn't know what we do. We don't really have much community support, but most of that I blame on our fishermen.”

“The big problem in Morro Bay is a shift in the [community’s] mindset. We've got some developers here on the waterfront that are trying to move [fishermen] out. We got a city council and a mayor and a bunch of people [that are trying] to push us out... Most of us don't get to vote [in local elections because] most of us don't live in Morro Bay; we live out of town [so] we can't vote... It’s a big concern.”

## Well-Being, Overall/Additional Comments

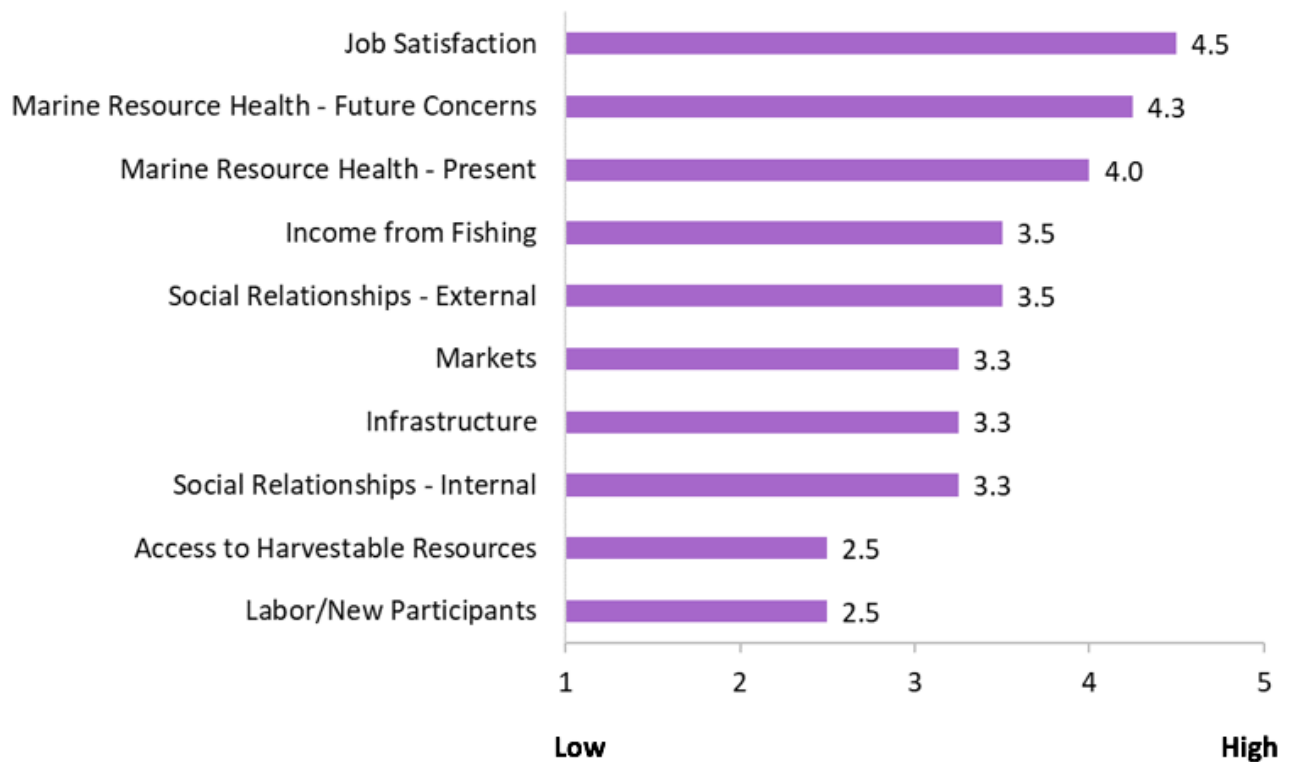
**12. Overall/Open-ended** *Is there anything not captured above that you would like managers and other readers to know about your fishing community/industry?*

- *What do you think federal and state managers could do to better support California's fishing communities?*
- *What do you think members of your fishing industry could do to support the well-being or sustainability of your fishing community?*

**Discussion Summary** Participants felt they had expressed everything they wanted to share through the previously asked questions.

## Perceptions of Fishing Community Well-being, Average Responses for Questions 1-6, 8-11

(Note: The following figure does not include the average rating for question 7. COVID-19 Impacts.)

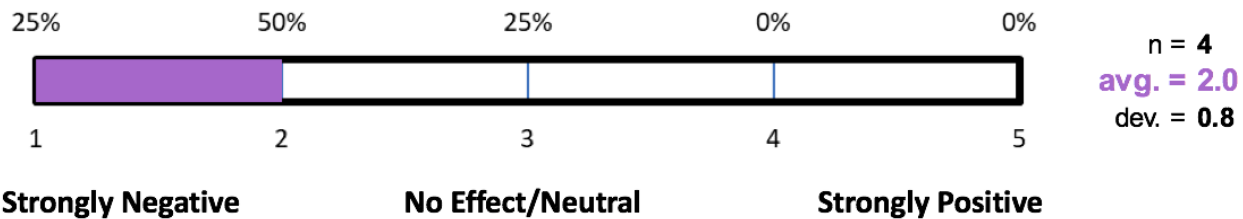




## Perceptions of MPAs

### MPAs, Outcomes/Effects

**13. MPA Ecological Outcomes** Overall, how would you rate the effect that the California MPA network has had on marine resource health in your area?



**Discussion Summary** When asked about ecological outcomes or impacts from the MPA network, participants reported having seen no positive effects on marine resources. However, in some cases, participants stated MPAs have adversely affected marine resource health.

- One participant shared their frustration that the suggestion made by decision-makers and scientists of MPA spillover and increased abundance of marine resources outside MPAs had not come to fruition.
  - One participant shared that some fisheries scientists respected by the fishing industry have found MPAs to be ineffective fisheries management tools.
- Several fishermen expressed concerns about the impacts of fishing on marine resources outside of MPAs due to crowding in open areas.

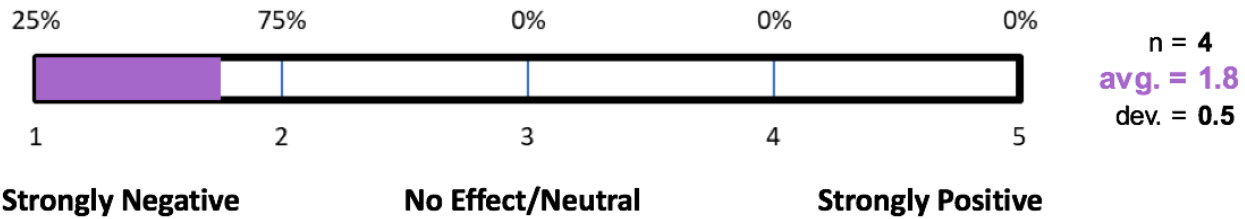
### Participant Quotes

“There's no spillover. All these fish that are in these nearshore areas are territorial. They don't move. The cabezon, the grass bass, the gopher cod larva might flow in the kelp a little bit. But basically, they stay in the same area. We proved it by catching them, tagging them, taking them 10 miles away, releasing them, and then recapturing them a year later in the same spot.”

“I don't think [the MPA network] has had any effect as far as what they said [the MPAs] were going to do. But I think it's had a negative effect [on marine resources]. Guys crowd up. Boy, you draw a line and [fishermen] set on it.”

“We fought like hell to try to get the [Blue Ribbon Task Force] to really know fishing and how fishing works. And when they put a bunch of MPAs in the best [nearshore] areas that we have fished for years and years, that when they leave little areas open close to port, [those areas] get hammered... I don't think the MPAs are doing anything, nothing. Except causing overfishing.”

**14a. MPA Livelihood Outcomes** Overall, how would you rate the effect that the MPA network has had on the ability for fishermen from your port to earn a living/gain income from fishing?



**Discussion Summary** Please see the **Discussion Summary** following question 14b. *MPA Effects - Overall* which summarizes the conversations related to questions 14a and 14b.

**14b. MPA Effects - Overall** What other types of effects or impacts have fishermen from your port experienced from MPA implementation?

**Discussion Summary** When discussing livelihood and overall impacts from MPAs, all participants highlighted the adverse effects of MPAs on fishermen from Morro Bay and Port San Luis.

- One participant shared their decision to leave certain fisheries following the implementation of the MPA network due to the loss of fishing grounds. They also described the challenges of tracking fish cycles similar to how they used to before the MPAs were put in place, which has hurt fishermen’s ability to make a living year-round.
- One participant identified an increase in fishing pressure outside the MPAs. They also reported challenges for fishermen to make a viable living and justify longer fishing trips to find areas to fish outside MPAs.
- Participants noted that while fishing is a dangerous business, MPAs have made their job more difficult, especially to continue to be profitable.
  - A couple of participants emphasized how fishermen have to travel further offshore during certain times of the year, which can be challenging under certain weather conditions. One participant described the increased amount of fuel used and the additional time out on the ocean that adds wear-and-tear on the vessel and can be exhausting for fishermen.
  - Several participants described the increase in crowding, compaction, and displacement since there is less area available for fishing due to MPAs.
- One participant felt it was inappropriate to use MPAs as a fisheries management tool to protect certain resources (e.g., rockfishes); they believed MPAs have negatively affected fishermen’s livelihoods without providing sufficient resource protection.

**Participant Quotes**

“There are certain areas that are closed that we can't fish in. The crabs aren't always there, but they are at certain times, and when they are, we can't fish in those areas anymore. And the gear that we use doesn't affect anything else in that closed area. And for us to be shut out of that, it takes food off of our table at certain times of the year.”

“The MPAs we have down here are where we used to catch crabs that we can't fish anymore. They're on the beach, you're tucked in there at Purisma, you're tucked in there at [Point] Arguello, and that's tough country... So, you have to fish farther offshore. There's a big

difference between eight and 10 and 12 and 18 fathoms below Purisma in the springtime, and 40, 50, 60 fathoms. So you're pushed offshore. So yeah, there's a safety issue."

"Well, I think the guys are still able to fill their quota. It takes longer. More fuel to burn, more time on the ocean... You're still able to do it if you fish hard. These guys fish every day. The nearshore guys that go every day. So they're still making a living, but of course, they're spending a lot more going. So it just takes longer, and they are fishing the areas harder than they would if the areas were still open where we saw fish."

"[The MPA network is] wrong, you know. [MPAs] don't really have a purpose other than they are a political feel-good. And that's the detriment to this industry, it's a political feel-good, has nothing to do with real science. We're being put out of business by political make-you-feel-good [antics]."

"[Decision-makers] didn't need to go to the extremes they did, taking all our best fishing grounds away... We told them in the beginning 'hey, you guys better look at this nearshore fishery. There's a lot of guys doing it.' That's all they needed to do is investigate that [fishery], and everything would have been fine, but they didn't. Instead, they put a bunch of MPAs in, which really screwed things up. And I'll never forgive them for that."

## MPAs, Discussion of Specific MPAs

### **15. MPA Effects - MPA Specific** Which MPAs have had the most impact (positive or negative) on fishermen from your port and why?

**Discussion Summary** Participants emphasized that MPAs from Point Conception to Big Sur have negatively affected local commercial fishermen.

- *Point Buchon State Marine Reserve (SMR) and Point Buchon State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA)*: Participants identified this MPA complex as having the greatest impact on the Morro Bay/Port San Luis commercial fleet. One participant explained the proximity of these areas to the Morro Bay harbor has been detrimental to the local fleet's ability to fish safely and efficiently.
- *Vandenberg SMR*: Participants explained this was an area regularly fished by nearshore fishermen out of Port San Luis. One participant highlighted this area was also a prime area for Dungeness crab.
- *Piedras Blancas SMR and Piedras Blancas SMCA*: Participants identified this as a main nearshore area where fishermen would be able to catch their quota during a day trip. One participant highlighted the reef off of Piedras Blancas Light Station as important nearshore fishing grounds.
- *Big Creek SMR*: One participant explained how this was a primary area for spot prawn fishing, specifically off the canyons. Another participant highlighted this MPA (and the area north of Big Creek SMR) has negatively affected the black cod fishery. One participant expressed concern that anchoring is prohibited in this area, which affects a fisherman's ability to spend multiple days in an area which also poses a safety issue.
- *Point Sur SMR and Point Sur SMCA*: One participant expressed frustration with the large area these MPAs cover and questioned whether the entire area was necessary to be restricted to

achieve management goals.

- *Portuguese Ledge SMCA*: One participant highlighted the impact of this MPA to spot prawn fishermen out of Monterey and the surrounding area, including Morro Bay/Port San Luis.

### Participant Quotes

“All the MPAs have an impact on fishing and local fishermen.”

“On this map [of the MPA network], it doesn't look like a lot of area to somebody that doesn't know [about fishing], but it is a lot of area. [...] You could put a pretty long string or two or three or five in each and every one of these areas. And you can take care of business.”

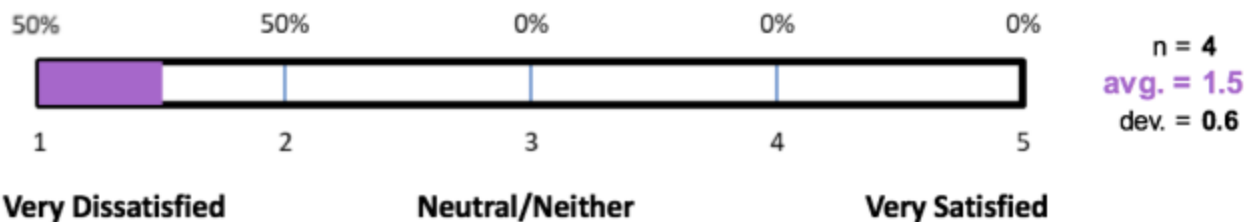
“The biggest issue, the biggest impact on the Morro Bay [and Avila] fishermen, for sure, is Point Buchon [SMR and SMCA]. I mean, that's a close area [to our harbor] where they put an MPA, which they didn't need to do.”

“We lost some area there. Buchon [SMR and SMCA], Piedras Blancas [SMR and SMCA], [Vandenberg SMR]. We lost some good crab grounds. And all three of those, once again, they're closer to the beach [which helps with safety]. Typically we fish [south]. The better fishing is from April on. And it's going to gale every day, those areas you could work.”

“[Big Creek SMR] is another spot that was very close to a protected anchorage. You could spend a couple of days in that area, get the mornings in and have a place to spend the afternoon and make a trip out of it. And that's been taken away.”

### MPAs, Management

**16. MPA Management** Overall, how satisfied do you think fishermen from your port are with the management of the MPA network?



**Discussion Summary** Participants were generally dissatisfied with the management of the MPA network, especially concerning the MPA planning process.

- Participants questioned how MPAs are managed and in relation to what goals.
  - Several participants expressed confusion with how decision-makers define and apply adaptive management. One participant suggested the term “adaptive management” implies using data collected from MPA monitoring efforts to inform how the MPAs are managed. They expressed concern about this term being used in the context of the MPA network since they don’t believe decision-makers are open to making MPA management changes in response to the best available information, including fishermen’s knowledge.

- One participant asked if there would be changes to MPA designations or complete removal if MPAs are shown not to be effective. Another participant suggested that the MPA network be managed like MPAs in Australia, where no-take areas are rotated, which helps keep kelp and other marine resources thriving.
- Participants spoke to the deep mistrust between fishermen and managers due to the MPA planning process. In addition, several participants expressed their frustration with the outcome of the placement and designations of the Central Coast MPAs.
  - Several participants believed the MPA network was put in place to be responsive to political pressures. However, participants believed MPAs are not designed in the best interest of the marine resources they are meant to protect. One participant suggested there are alternatives to MPAs that would achieve management goals more effectively.
- One participant felt the MPA planning process was designed to allocate funding for ecological research but fails to invest in active management to help improve marine resources, essentially deeming them “paper parks.”
  - Several participants highlighted the exercise that asked fishermen to identify their prime fishing grounds during MPA implementation—and how decision-makers used this information—to determine MPA placement as one of the most detrimental experiences during the planning process.

### Participant Quotes

“What are they managing, exactly?”

“If there was interest in real management, I think there could be better alternatives than MPAs.”

“You know, they had this word 'adaptive management' [that decision-makers used] a lot during the process. So what does that exactly mean? If they find out the MPAs aren't working, are they going to change them?”

“You know, we suggested to rotate the reserves like they do in Australia, and that works really well over there in Australia. But [the California Department of Fish and Wildlife doesn't want] to. I mean, once they get these MPAs in place, are they going to be forever? I mean, why? Why can't they move them around and open some reserves up and weed out that fish and break that dirty old kelp up that's rotting on the surface?”

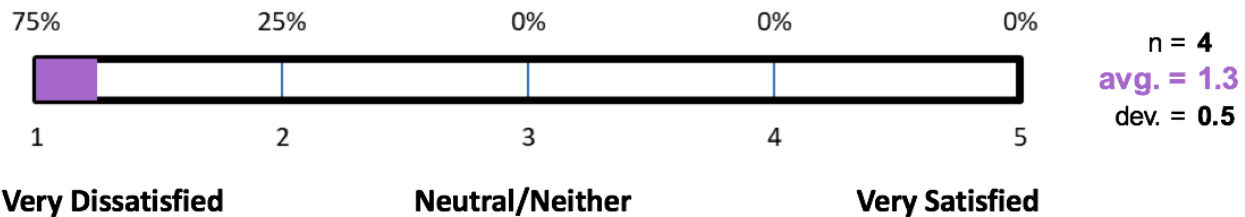
“There's been a lot of broken trust with the fishermen. The logs were used [during the MPA planning process]. The heaviest fished areas [are] the areas they closed. So now, I mean, the big thing with the fleet is as soon as you get a logbook and you're new to the fishery, they tell you don't ever put where you're really fishing on those logbooks. And there's just a severe broken trust between the management and the fishermen. We don't want to work with [managers] if we feel we're going to work with [them and then they] take the prime area. So that's one of the consequences, is the trust is broken.”

“The trust isn't broken, there is no trust. They lied to us. We deserve better than that. [...] They wanted to put the MPAs in, and nothing was going to stop them. And they would have even

made them bigger if they could have. At the end of the [Blue Ribbon Task Force] meeting, they did. They made [Point Sur SMR] bigger. It was ridiculous.”

“They're paper parks. That’s what they are.”

**17. MPA Monitoring** Overall, how satisfied do you think fishermen from your port are with the monitoring of the MPA network?



**Discussion Summary** Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the MPA monitoring program due to being uninformed of monitoring efforts.

- One participant shared that once the MPAs were implemented in the Central Coast, fishermen were involved in some research efforts during the first few years. While this short-term partnership was seen as a positive by those fishermen involved, they felt the state has not set the ongoing investment and priority to continue funding these collaborative efforts.
  - One participant felt it is essential to involve fishermen in monitoring because it communicates that researchers and managers value fishermen’s expertise. However, they also emphasized the need for funding to be prioritized for this type of collaborative work.
  - One participant questioned whether not involving fishermen in collaborative research efforts was because the data collected indicated the MPAs were not performing as expected.
- One participant questioned the validity of relying on citizen science as—what they believed—the primary method for MPA data collection.

**Participant Quotes**

“[Monitoring] was [effective] back when they were doing it.”

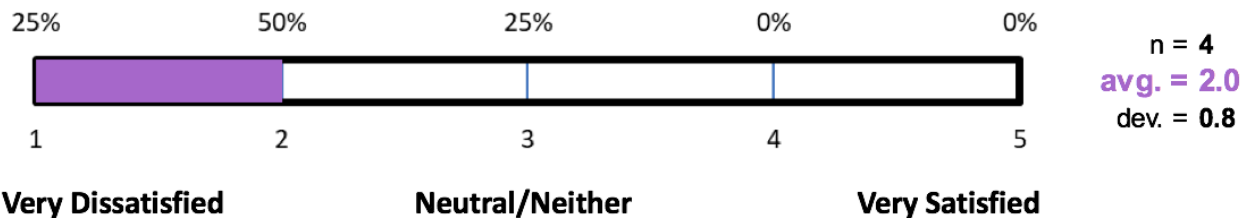
“During the whole MLPA meetings, [managers and decision-makers] were all hip on fishermen doing the monitoring and working on it and managing it, helping the [California Department of Fish and Wildlife] manage it [and conduct] research. They were going to involve the fishermen, [and] they did for the first couple of years when Packard was still putting money out for it. But [the California Department of Fish and Wildlife] didn't want to put any money out for it, so they stopped it. I mean, we had a really good protocol going. We were going in and out of the MPAs. We were tagging. Catch per unit effort. Cal Poly was all on board with that, but then all of a sudden it stopped.”

“Once we [fishermen collaborators] started coming up with the evidence that the MPAs really weren't working the way they [researchers] thought they would work, they stopped [working with us]. We went into Big Creek twice, three-day trips, two of them. We brought 5,000 tags with this. I think we caught 300 fish in the MPAs at Big Creek. There's no fish in there. The only

kind of fish in there are all the big lingcod and cabezon. If you fish in the open areas versus the MPA areas, it was basically the same, maybe even a little bit better in the open areas.”

“[Researchers] need to get down and dirty on the ground, see what's going on in these MPAs, see how they're affecting everyone, see how it's affecting the fish because that's what we're talking about here. Fish. And do something, you know. I mean, it's tiring. We need something done.”

**18. MPA Enforcement** Overall, how satisfied do you think fishermen from your port are with the enforcement of MPAs?



**Discussion Summary** Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with MPA enforcement in the Morro Bay/Port San Luis area, specifically the inconsistencies with how regulations are enforced by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Law Enforcement Division officers.

- Participants shared that enforcement is either extreme or absent, which has led many fishermen to distrust local wardens.
  - One participant felt a contradiction between how commercial fishermen and sport fishermen are treated by wardens, especially during the weekends when recreational anglers are more active, and wardens may not be on duty.
  - One participant felt wardens should respond to violations more quickly and not allow for days to pass before they question fishermen about their on-the-water activities. They stressed this was especially important if the warden did not witness illegal fishing activity occurring.
- Several participants highlighted there are times when fishing gear can drift into MPAs due to kelp and weather, but most commercial fishermen abide by MPA regulations.
- Several participants expressed confusion on the type of information and evidence that wardens use when prosecuting a violation, which does not appear consistent across cases they were aware of.

**Participant Quotes**

“Enforcement is either over the top or nonexistent. There doesn't seem like there's any middle of the road, you know. [There's] no rhyme or reason why or when [enforcement] happens. So I think there's distrust in the enforcement.”

“It's hard to catch a guy in an MPA fishing, especially if he has a fast boat. He's got radar, and the sport guys do it all the time. But the commercial guys don't do it. I mean, there has been a few guys that accidentally were fishing in an MPA, drifted over the line, something like that. Which [enforcement] should cut a little slack to. But the [commercial] guys that are deliberately fishing in the MPAs and they don't care, [enforcement] doesn't catch them.”



"I feel like any weekend you can go look at the Buchon closure, and there's going to be sport guys in skiffs with their lines in the water. And I don't know, maybe [the California Department of Fish and Wildlife] tickets them or whatever. But I feel like any Friday, Saturday, Sunday, you go up to Buchon and there's sporties up there fishing."

"At the [Channel] Islands. I mean, you're setting near the line. Current's going or something messes up and all of a sudden you're drifting into one of the closures with a net in the water. And [enforcement will] go back and ticket guys, just based on what other people have told the [California Department of Fish and Wildlife]. [The California Department of Fish and Wildlife] will show up at the dock and say 'hey, it was reported you were fishing' and they'll give guys tickets. That kind of blows my mind that they can give tickets without even actually physically seeing you. [...] A lot of times [enforcement's] response is 'well, just work it out with a court,' which is bizarre to me."

**19. MPA Overall** *Any additional comments or concerns about the MPAs and MPA management you would like to communicate?*

**Discussion Summary** Participants expressed concerns and frustrations with their repeated participation and involvement in fisheries management processes, including MPA management.

- Participants shared how commercial fishermen generally feel like their perspectives are not valued or respected by managers or decision-makers.
- One participant emphasized the perceived lack of communication between fishermen and decision-makers, which leads fishermen to feel left out of policy processes and believe management and monitoring is not occurring.
- Several participants expressed concerns that decision-makers would use the information gathered during the focus group discussions in support of this project to further restrict fishermen's access to marine resources.
  - One participant questioned how the information gathered during this and other focus groups will be used and by whom. Another participant expressed concerns about how decision-makers would apply the focus group data to the state's 30x30 priorities.
  - One participant stated they would not have participated in the focus group discussion if not for their trusted relationship with project team members.
- One participant highlighted that the general public enjoys fresh seafood and that managers and decision-makers should do more to support and promote California's local commercial fishing industry. They emphasized the respectful relationship most commercial fishermen have with the ocean and their commitment to responsible fishing practices to ensure the sustainability of marine resources.

**Participant Quotes**

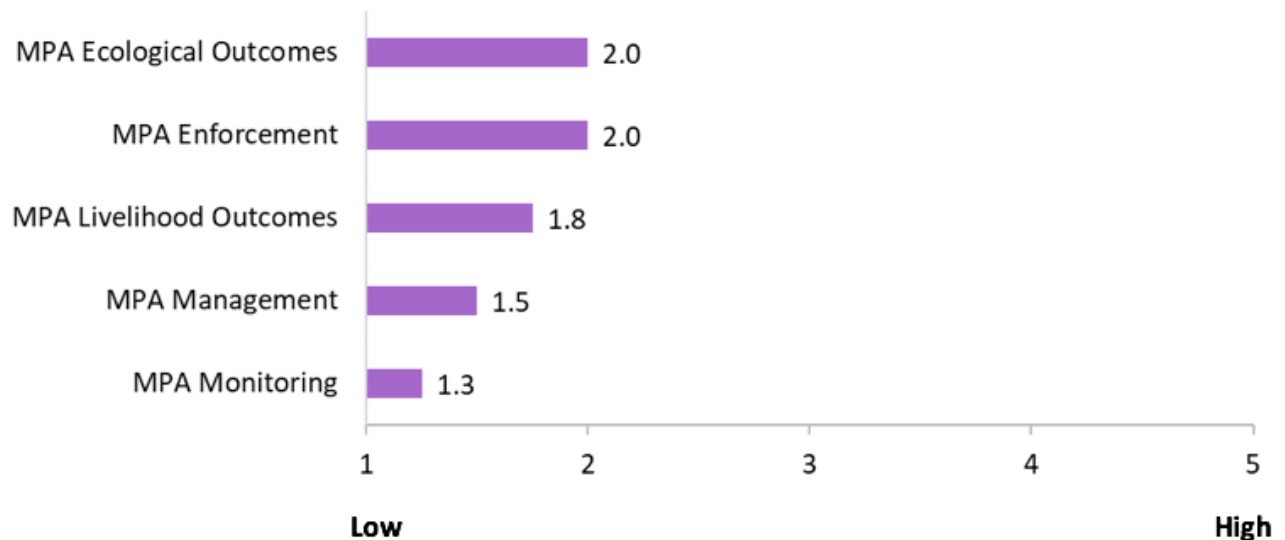
"Over the last 20 years, we've adapted our operations to satisfy [decision-makers]. It's cost us thousands of hours and thousands of dollars to rerig gear, to change things, to do things, to be accepted. For everything that's been taken away from us, not one thing has ever been given back. So for us to keep coming to the table and trying [to participate in these discussions], it's getting harder and harder."

“There's no clear, direct channels of communication [between fishermen and decision-makers]. Most guys don't have a clue how to get stuff changed or what the process is. So guys' default then is just frustration and poorly venting. I mean, I don't know who to call. I don't know how often anything's actually surveyed or studied. So it's just a big mystery: why is there spots on the chart we can't fish?”

“They [decision-makers] can say [...] they don't have intentions of doing [anything that will negatively affect fishermen]. That's [what] they told us in the very beginning [of the MPA planning process]. [...] You know, we're going to participate in these conference calls because, if you're not in the room, you're on the menu. But I mean, we've heard this before. [...] We gave them all the information [fishing activity that informed MPA locations]. The minute you said Ecotrust, the only reason I didn't hang up is because you're [project team member, name redacted, was] on the other end of this call and I trust you. But they screwed us. [From] the very beginning, they did. We all did the interviews. [...] It's hard not to be pissed off.”

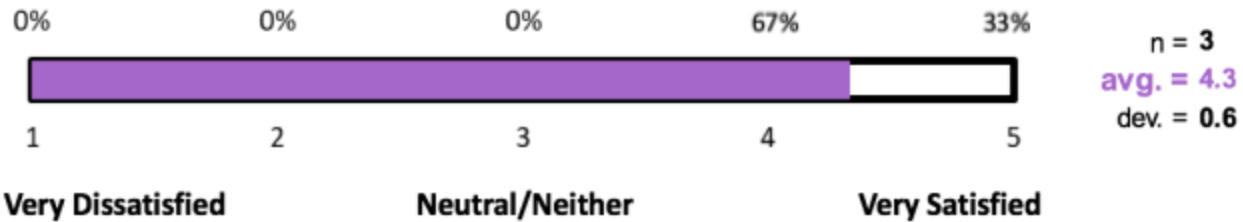
“[Decision-makers] should really respect us a little bit more than they do because everybody likes fresh seafood. And if they get rid of us [through regulations, etc.], all that seafood's coming from overseas [...] We're the most restricted fisheries in California, in the world... We're not hurting anybody. We're just trying to make a living and supplying seafood to the public. [...] You know, we all have families, we are all trying to make a living. We respect the ocean. We're not polluting it. I don't know why the big push to make us into outlaws, you know?”

### Perceptions of MPAs, Average Responses for Questions 13-14a, 16-18



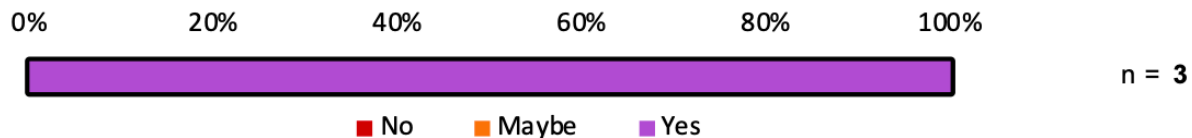
## Feedback on Virtual Process

**20a. Satisfaction with the Virtual Process** Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience participating in this virtual focus group?



**20b. Willingness to Participate in Virtual Process in Future** Would you be open to participating in a virtual focus group or meeting like this in the future?

(Note: For the following figure, the length of the purple bar indicates the remaining percent of participants who responded ‘Yes’. If participants responded ‘No’ or ‘Maybe,’ a red or orange bar, respectively, would appear.)



**20c. Process Open-ended** Can you share any additional comments about your experience in this virtual focus group? What do you think are some of the pros and cons of having a conversation like this online rather than in-person?

**Discussion Summary** Participants reflected on the positive experience with the virtual process and expressed their interest in participating in a meeting like this in the future.

- One participant appreciated the opportunity to share their perspectives with the project team and convey their concerns and feelings with a group interested in learning from one another.
- Several participants expressed concerns that the focus group experience was a “box checking” exercise by decision-makers, which has generally been their experience with fishery-related projects/discussions.
  - One participant acknowledged that fishermen are tired of repeatedly coming to the table, only to feel decision-makers do not consider fishermen’s perspectives and expertise as valuable or valid.

### Participant Quotes

“I think the best thing about this type of [focus group experience] is the fact that at least we get to say how we feel, you know. Not that that makes things better. But sometimes it takes a little bit of pressure off the back of your brain when you can actually try and relate to someone and have other people of like minds relating the same thing. So, you know, [the focus group discussion was] not a bad experience.”

“It's been real nice talking with the other three guys here. I respect them all. And I know they're pros. They have put in a lot of time [to their fishing businesses]. [...] So I do appreciate you guys just listening to us. I hope it is productive, and I appreciate the guys [in this focus group] for putting the time in [to participate].”

“I'm glad [the project team is] doing this, wanting to know what [fishermen] think about what's going on in the ocean. But, you know, I've done so many of these. Not exactly like this, but over the years, I have. And it just kind of, like, I'm not saying you guys are checking the box. But basically, that's what they've done in the past: OK, we got the fishermen's input, let's check the box. We don't need to hear from them again.”

“Do I trust [this type of conversation?], no. Because we've been screwed before, but we'll keep coming back to the room, you know, and we'll see where it goes. All [the project team] can do is take the message.”