

## 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 Ventura/Channel Islands Area'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 Group: Ventura/Channel Islands Area Ports**

**Date: Wednesday, September 16, 2020**

**Participants: Nathan Rosser, Vitaly Sviridoff, one anonymous participant**

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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.

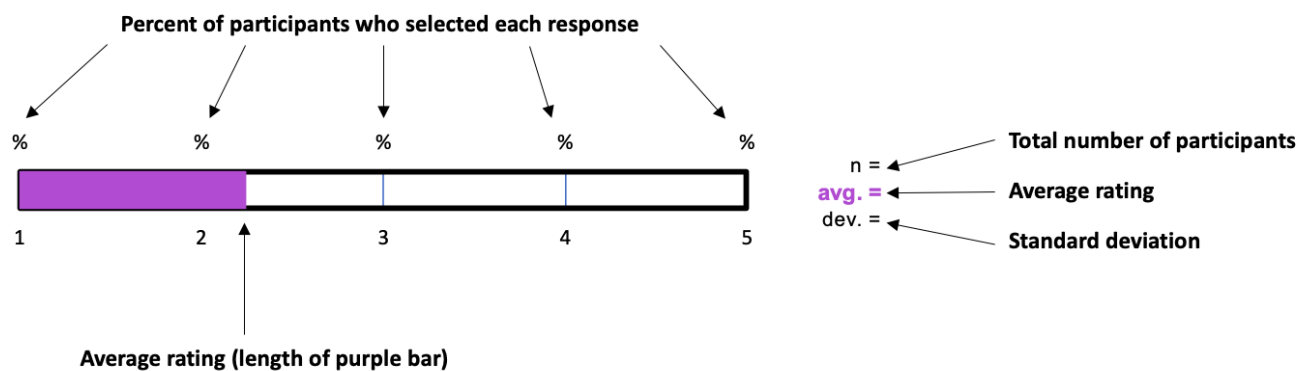
## Overview

On September 16, 2020, three commercial fishermen operating out of the Ventura/Channel Islands area participated in the sixth 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 13 and 19 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:

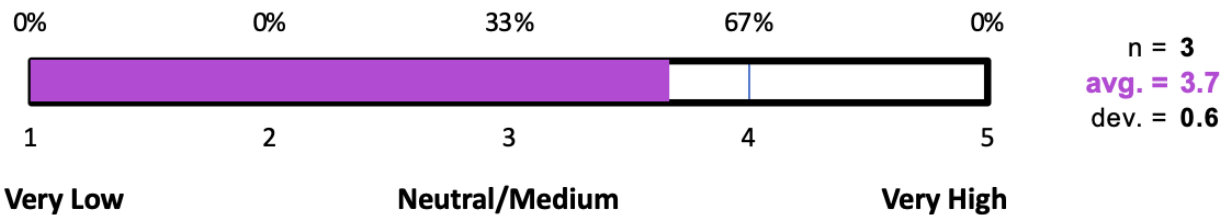
- [California Fisheries Data Explorer](#): This interactive site allows users to visualize commercial landings data (i.e., number of fishermen, pounds of fish landed, and revenue from fish landed) and CPFV logbook data (i.e., number of anglers, vessels, trips, and fish caught from specific fisheries and ports).
- [MPA Baseline Monitoring Program: South Coast](#)
  - [Summary of Findings from Baseline Monitoring of Marine Protected Areas, 2011–2015, South Coast](#)

Our Project Team would like to express our appreciation to the three Ventura/Channel Islands area fishermen—Nathan Rosser, Vitaly Sviridoff, and one anonymous participant—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 reported that marine resource health is cyclical and that while the species fishermen from the Ventura and Channel Islands area depend on are currently in a down cycle, the resources are generally healthy.

- With regard to sea urchin, one participant shared how catches are trending upward compared to the last several years, particularly since the 2015 warm water “blob” event. They attributed this change to increased kelp abundance and less fishing pressure.
- One fisherman perceived there to be more sub-legal or short lobsters than lobsters that could be retained in waters below Santa Barbara. They noted there is increased fishing pressure and competition in the area with more traps and lobster fishermen. Another participant believed that overall lobster abundance across size classes is high.
- One fisherman indicated that the sea cucumber fishery is currently doing well after several years of increased fishing pressure, warmer waters, and fishing regulations that shortened the fishing season.
- One participant believed that there is sufficient rock crab abundance though their catch volume is low because of where they choose to fish.

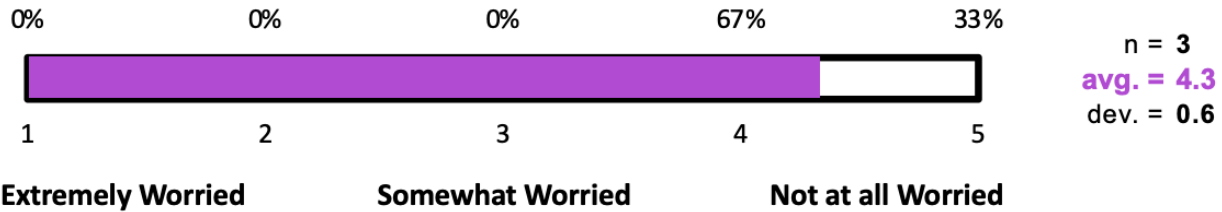
### Participant Quotes

“I would say [sea urchin] catches are trending up a little bit now that we have some more kelp and because of the fact that quite a few guys [. . .] took other jobs or maybe they were already at retirement age [. . .] It just seems like there's a little bit less pressure and a little bit more seaweed so I was kind of on the line between neutral/medium and high; I guess I'll give it a 3.5 [rating]. We're not in a great place, but it was worse a few years ago.”

“I put neutral because I keep seeing less keepers and more short lobsters in our area while I'm pulling my traps. So I'll usually see like 50-50 some years, and the last two years, I've been seeing more shorts than the keepers.”

“[I've] seen a lot of sea cucumbers during the closed season and have had some pretty good catches when the season opens up so I'm seeing that resource come back and I'm pretty optimistic that in another couple years from now I would rate that one high as well, hopefully. But at the moment, we're kind of in that interim phase where we're waiting to see if the regulations we put in effect are going to do what we're hoping.”

**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** When reflecting on the future health of marine resources, participants expressed the view that the fisheries will continue to improve over time given that ocean conditions are cyclical, though there was some worry with regard to ocean and climate change into the future.

- One fisherman communicated that the fisheries are managed well enough that there is not a cause for concern. They gave the example that while there are many sub-legal lobsters currently, they will grow to be of retainable size in the future.
- Another fisherman shared that the current abundance of sea urchin and sea cucumber resources and the management of these fisheries indicates that they will be healthy into the future.
- One participant expressed concerns related to the effect ocean acidification might have on shellfish populations and the market quality of sea urchins as a result of warmer water and lower kelp abundance. They highlighted the cyclical nature of marine resources, but also stated that warmer oceans may become the new normal.
- One fisherman identified human impacts on lobster, particularly increased fishing pressure, as a source of concern into the future.

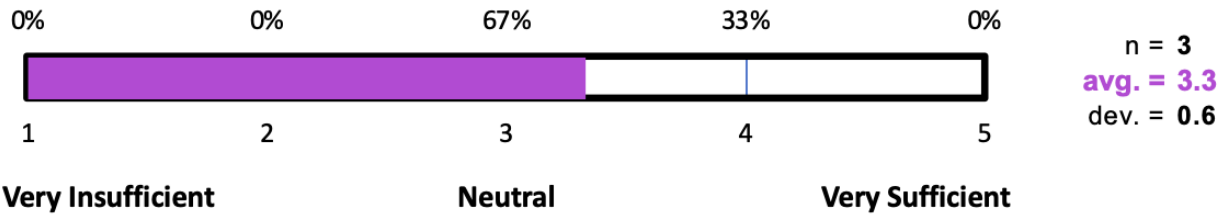
**Participant Quotes**

“From a resource or regulatory perspective, I'm not worried about the urchin or cucumber fisheries at all. [ . . . ] The thing that I'm concerned about is more just ocean or climate change and its effect on the fisheries [ . . . ] if the warm waters persist and the kelp is just at a lower level in my lifetime than it was in a previous fisherman's lifetime.”

“My concern was [ . . . ] as long as more people come to the area, we will see less lobsters. [ . . . ] I'm not talking about all areas. I'm talking about one specific area which is below Santa Barbara, block numbers 653 and 654.”

## 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 expressed several positives related to access to commercial fishing resources for fishermen from their port, but noted that it is difficult to consider access without factoring in MPA restrictions which several participants noted had lowered their ratings to ‘neutral.’

- A couple participants shared that there is a range of fisheries available to support commercial fishermen, including rock crab, lobster, sea urchin, sea cucumber, squid, rockfish, and black cod.
- One participant explained that there is sufficient volume of fish available off the coast, and that a fisherman's catch depends on the level of effort they are willing to put in.
- With regard to restrictions that inhibit access, one fisherman identified that there are often financial barriers to obtaining fishing permits.

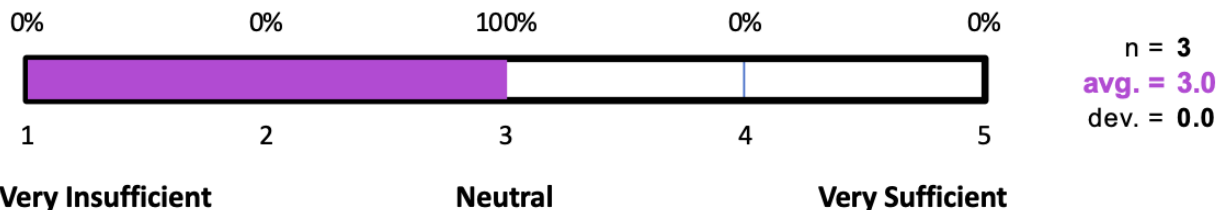
#### Participant Quotes

“I think my answer would probably differ a little bit if I was considering marine protected areas versus not because obviously we can't access the area. So I think that affects the answer.”

“As far as diversity of fisheries, I think that's pretty good. [ . . . ] There's plenty you can do if you have some tenacity to figure it out.”

“[In terms of] restrictions that inhibit access, there's the financial barrier to some of the permits. But I think if you really want it, you can find someone to give you the money and work hard to get. There's ways around all that stuff.”

### 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 that commercial fishing revenue is often insufficient to make a stable living.

- One participant shared that while some fishermen earn enough to support their livelihoods, others seem to struggle to make ends meet with the income they earn.

- One fisherman explained how they started fishing full-time but now earn half of their income from fishing because they have since gotten a second job.
- Another participant explained that whether a fisherman’s income is sufficient depends on their standard of living and if they have a family to support. Fishermen can not live off the income earned in a single fishery; they need to diversify.

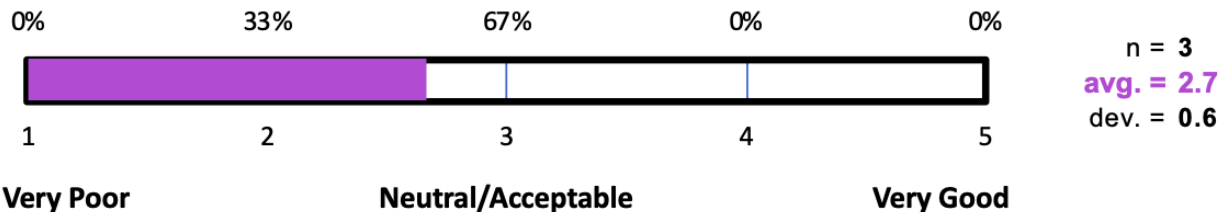
**Participant Quotes**

“I started out full-time fishing and then I took on another job. So I do get about half my income from fishing and the other half from the other job. I see some guys that are full time that I'm friends with and, yeah, you can definitely make a living full-time, but everybody has a different standard of living. Guys have different work ethics and different financial means and for some guys, it seems like they really struggle to make ends meet and there's some that do really well.”

“I didn't feel like [this question] justified ‘sufficient’ because as fishermen, [our income] is never enough. And at the end of the day, it's a lot of work maintaining a boat and just all of the work that entails in keeping your operation ready to go 100 percent of the time. I think we could all use a little bit more money.”

“[Fishermen] are trying to make a decent living out of what they're doing.”

**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 noted that, compared to surrounding ports, markets in the Ventura and Channel Islands area could be better.

- Several participants shared that buyers are charged an unloading tax in Ventura harbor, making it less profitable for fishermen to sell their product to local buyers. They added that the harbor could improve access for fish buyers in the area and should explore the applicability of market opportunities afforded to other ports, such as Santa Barbara, in Ventura.
- One participant explained how there are limited direct marketing options, which are often restricted to a Saturday market. They would like to see more opportunities and resources for fishermen to direct market their product.
- With regard to the sea cucumber fishery, one fisherman communicated how the price has been stagnant for the last couple of years and there is only one main buyer out of the Channel Islands harbor.
- One participant explained how processors are usually willing to buy sea urchin, but that the price could always be higher.

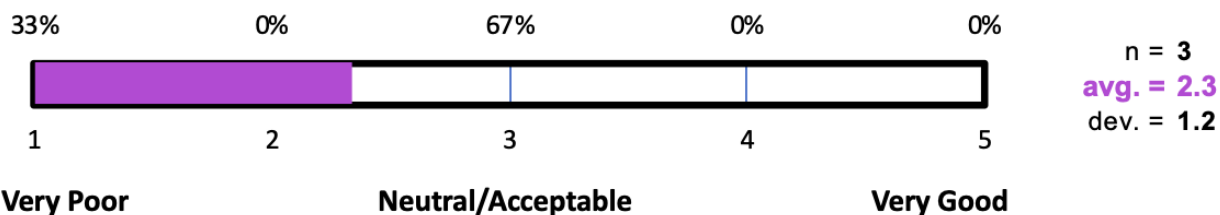
**Participant Quotes**

“There are not enough buyers [in Ventura harbor] and I don't think my harbor supports the buyers to come to our harbor because they charge an additional fee.”

“I put neutral only because I see better markets, better harbor [in] Santa Barbara harbor. That’s the best place to sell where everything gets done for the commercial fishery. And so [. . .] I'd say Channel Islands [harbor], it's somewhere in between. So it's not perfect, it's not the best. But I mean, it’s okay/acceptable.”

“There hasn't been much diversity [in markets for sea cucumber]. A few years ago, there were quite a few sea cucumber buyers and then last year we had two main buyers and then this year one of our main buyers didn’t buy so there was only one buyer in Channel Islands harbor. So there wasn't much diversity and you're kind of a little bit worried - do you decide to stop buying or drop the price? There wouldn’t be anywhere else to turn.”

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



**Discussion Summary** Participants discussed the poor state of the limited infrastructure in the Ventura and Channel Islands harbors.

- Several participants shared that because there is one working hoist in the Channel Islands harbor, there are often long wait times to use it. One participant noted the harbor commission’s prospects to redevelop the wharf at some point, including purchasing several operable and reliable hoists.
- Participants noted the lack of ice and other amenities in the Channel Islands harbor.
- One participant reflected on the limited infrastructure in Ventura harbor, including only one hoist, one pier, and limited slip space.

**Participant Quotes**

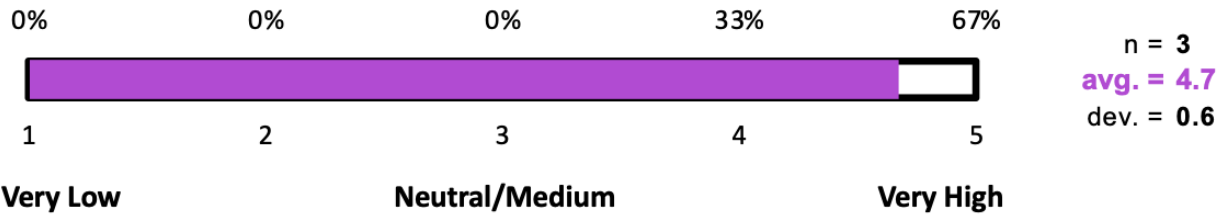
“I've been fishing out of Channel Islands harbor for 12 years now and never been able to not offboat urchins because of a lack of a hoist. Always had a working hoist. So I say [it's] acceptable. That being said, there's only one. So it can make for crowding when the weather's good. You're waiting in line to get the hoist which is annoying and if it’s hot out and your catch is sitting on the deck, that's not great.”

“There's no ice in the harbor. Santa Barbara, Morro Bay, everybody's got ice but Channel Islands. If you want ice, you got to drive your truck over to the ice place, get the ice, and bring it to your boat and schlep it - just lots more work.”

“We have one fish hoist in Ventura harbor for all the commercial guys, we have one pier that we're not even allowed to drive on anymore [. . .] our hardware is a little bit political so I just

didn't want to get into that, but our harbor for sure is not a good harbor towards commercial fishing and our harbor is designated as a commercial harbor. So it annoys me that there's limited slip space. There's a lot of things wrong with Ventura harbor."

**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 had extremely negative effects on the fisheries in the Ventura and Channel Islands area, particularly with regard to markets.

- Several participants described how overseas and restaurant markets disappeared during the first couple months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - One participant explained how very few fisheries were operating during the first few months of the pandemic because of the few market opportunities. Fishermen with longstanding relationships with buyers had small markets to sell to.
- Another participant shared how some fisheries, like lobster and black cod, were more affected than others, like sea urchin, based on the markets they serve. Even so, when the sea urchin fishery reopened, fishermen could only sell at a very low price, and some fishermen didn't immediately return to fishing as a result.
  - One participant stated that the pandemic started around the time of year when sea urchin prices are typically low, and that current prices are acceptable but not as high as they often are for this time of year.
  - One fisherman noted that they now need to give their processors several days notice, compared to several hours before the pandemic, if they will be bringing in sea urchins. They added that this is not as much of an issue for sea cucumbers which have a longer shelf life.
- One participant shared how fishermen who engaged in direct marketing before the pandemic were able to grow their business as more people sought access to fresh seafood that they could not obtain in stores or restaurants.

**Participant Quotes**

"Nobody fished for two months [due to COVID-19]. There were no markets. There were no restaurants open to sell to. The planes stopped going to China, which basically most seafood goes to, so when Trump stopped the planes that, in turn, stopped our commerce. And of course, you also have the tariffs. But with COVID, yes, it was very detrimental to the fishery."

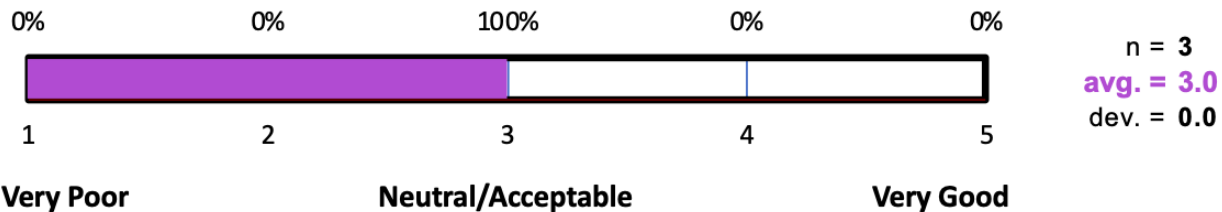
"When COVID first hit, [the sea urchin fishery] was basically shut down for a couple of months and then when it came back, it was at a super low price and some of the desperate guys went to work for a low price, but a lot of us were like 'don't work if you don't have to right now' because if we sell our product for this low, then the processors will know we're willing to work for pennies. So I think those of us that could afford to took a few months off."



“In the past, you could not talk to your processor for weeks and then you could text them halfway out to the [Channel] Islands and be like ‘hey, I’m going to be in this afternoon with urchins’ and they’re like ‘cool, thanks.’ Now I’ll hit them up a day or two before like ‘hey, I want to work these days this week’ to make sure that it fits with their program, that they’re gonna buy.”

## 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?



**Very Poor**

**Neutral/Acceptable**

**Very Good**

**Discussion Summary** When discussing labor, participants indicated that recruitment and retention in the commercial fishing industry was acceptable depending on the fishery.

- One participant explained how there is good longevity in the sea urchin and sea cucumber fisheries. They described how there is a smaller number of younger divers entering the fishing industry due to low profitability, adding that the lottery system is too complex and makes it difficult to obtain a sea urchin permit.
  - Another participant recounted how there used to be more sea urchin divers in Ventura harbor.
- One fisherman stated that there are increasingly more opportunities to recruit participants in Ventura harbor because of the growing squid fishery.

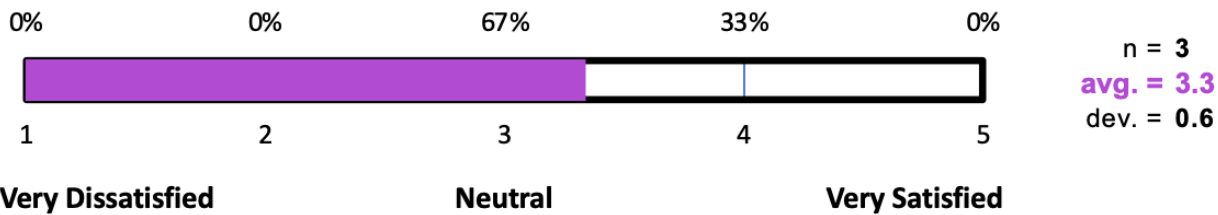
### Participant Quotes

“It’s been pretty much the same characters in the sea urchin and sea cucumber game for as long as I’ve been in it. So it’s definitely retaining some guys. There is a small crew of about like three, four of us new generation divers, sort of late-20s through mid-30s, so I guess we’re kind of doing all right as far as recruiting new entrants.”

“I feel there’s probably more veterans than there are new guys but the new guys seem to work really hard and get along and they seem to be doing okay. [. . .] The money’s just not there right now but I know it [will turn around]. Everything cycles - back in the day, there used to be 30 urchin divers just in Ventura harbor. It used to be crazy. You’d have to sit at the hoist - there was only one hoist - you’d be waiting an hour to unload something because there’s ten boats ahead of you.”

“It’s not that hard to get someone new. It’s not that hard to maintain them as long as you make them money. And I feel pretty much everybody in Ventura harbor are money-makers, generally.”

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



**Discussion Summary** Related to job satisfaction, participants indicated that the positives of being a commercial fishermen tend to outweigh the negatives.

- One participant explained how entering the fishing industry can be stressful but that, over time, commercial fishermen are able to set their own hours and be their own boss. They added that their sense of job security is related to whether they have the physical capacity to be a fisherman.
- With regard to the squid fishery, one participant shared how job satisfaction is often related to weather and ocean conditions that determine squid abundance.
- One participant said commercial fishing is more of a lifestyle than a job.

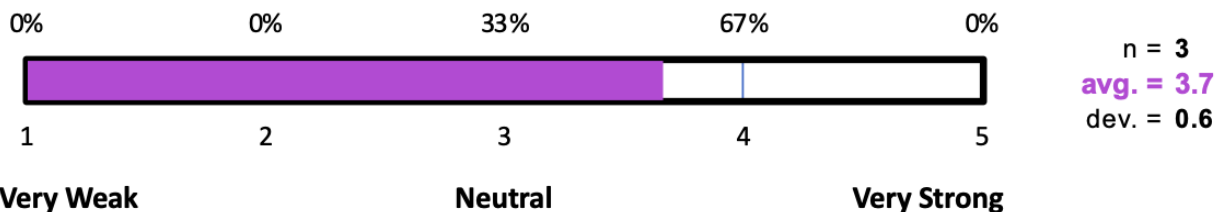
**Participant Quotes**

“If you like fishing, commercial fishing is the best job. [You can] work as hard as you want, [if] you don't want to work that hard, you don't have to. No one's telling you to do it. I think [ . . . ] it's super stressful [at the beginning when] you're trying to build a boat, you're trying to buy a permit, trying to figure out where to fish [ . . . ] but once you kind of get it dialed then yeah, stress level is low.”

“I think that they're [squid fishermen] probably a little bit unsatisfied because the warm water chases off the squid and there's no squid right now. So there's just not the money there, [but] we're just on a little down streak right now.”

“For me, there's not much stress because I'm the old guy on his way out, but I could see it being very stressful for someone that has a family and kids to feed. Everything I own is paid off already, so I definitely lead a different life.”

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



**Discussion Summary** Overall, participants reported that they felt social relationships within the Ventura and Channel Islands area fishing community were relatively strong, though there is room for more leadership.

- Participants indicated that there are good relationships among fishermen within fisheries.
- Several participants explained how leadership has decreased and how the fishery could benefit from having designated individuals as leaders in the community.
- One participant shared that older fishermen in the industry have served as mentors for them. They added that these types of relationships are important to them because they help to pass the fishing experience to younger generations.
- Another participant explained how fishermen are, overall, willing to work together and share fishing knowledge with each other.

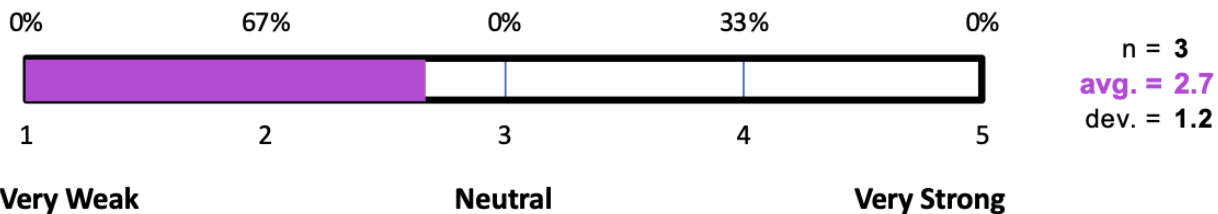
**Participant Quotes**

“We don't have [good] leadership. So here's the dilemma - we got [a] bad season coming up, bad prices coming up, and we don't have a person who [has] enough authority who can say to everyone ‘so guys, do not finish this season’ or ‘do not use it for the first month or a second month because we've got a bad price. Let's wait. Let's save our resources for a little bit and get a better price later’ [ . . . ] So we don't have those guys who are going to lead us in the right way.”

“There's some strong relationships within the fishery, like a real bond there. Being a younger guy, I've definitely had a handful of older fishermen [who are] like mentors that took me under their wing at the beginning, so I'd describe those relationships as strong. And I think that's really important for passing the fishing heritage on, especially for me because I don't come from a fishing family. So if I hadn't landed in the lap of a few of these guys who really showed me the ropes, I wouldn't be where I'm at.”

“All fishermen are nice, trying to share their information with each other. So, for example, like urchin divers or cucumber divers - they come up to us and say ‘okay guys, you're preparing for lobster season, there is a spot and there is lobster.’”

**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** With regard to the fishing community's relationship with external groups, participants believed the broader community could better support the commercial fishing industry.

- One fisherman explained that the industry as a whole is constantly being targeted by environmental organizations that have more power and influence in policy processes. The goals of these groups often do not align with those of the fishing community and it is becoming difficult for fishermen to maintain access to fisheries as a result. They added that the fishing industry is becoming too politicized.
- Another fisherman shared their experience on the California Sea Urchin Commission and with the California Sea Cucumber Diver's Association where a handful of fishermen are politically engaged while the rest of the fleet do not want to get involved. They explained that fishermen

determine their involvement based on whether they think engaging will make a difference in fisheries-related decision making processes.

### Participant Quotes

“As far as harbor patrol, they're great at Ventura harbor. I just think that the harbor itself can promote commercial fishing better, especially being a commercial harbor.”

“It's just all become too political; fishing is not like it used to be. It used to be great, but now [with] the environmental impact - which I understand environmental impact - but environmental groups that are against us are way more vast and way more funded than we are, and we are not structured enough to gain funding beyond the fact that we're not a fundable group. They'll sit there and eat our food but they're ‘oh no, with that gillnet, he kills everything’ and you're like ‘hey man, then quit eating seafood.’”

“There's a small percentage of guys that are really passionate about the local fishing politics and those of us that band together and we talk a lot and exchange a lot of emails and we know what's going on and when things are happening. And when issues arise, we do something about it. We're not necessarily the most effective and we might not have a ton of meetings all the time, but it seems like there's a lot of guys that just don't really want to be involved in that, and that's fine; fishing is an independent bunch, but there's a few guys that do and those of us that do, I feel like we're pretty tight.”

### 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** Several participants shared concerns related to how managers might use what they say in a manner that harms the industry.

- One participant explained how if fishermen indicate that there is a downward trend in marine resource health, more restrictions will be implemented. They do not trust that sharing this type of information will be used to the benefit of the fishery and fishery participants.
- Another participant questioned whether fishermen's input will be seriously considered in marine resource decision making or if their participation is a false front for resource managers.

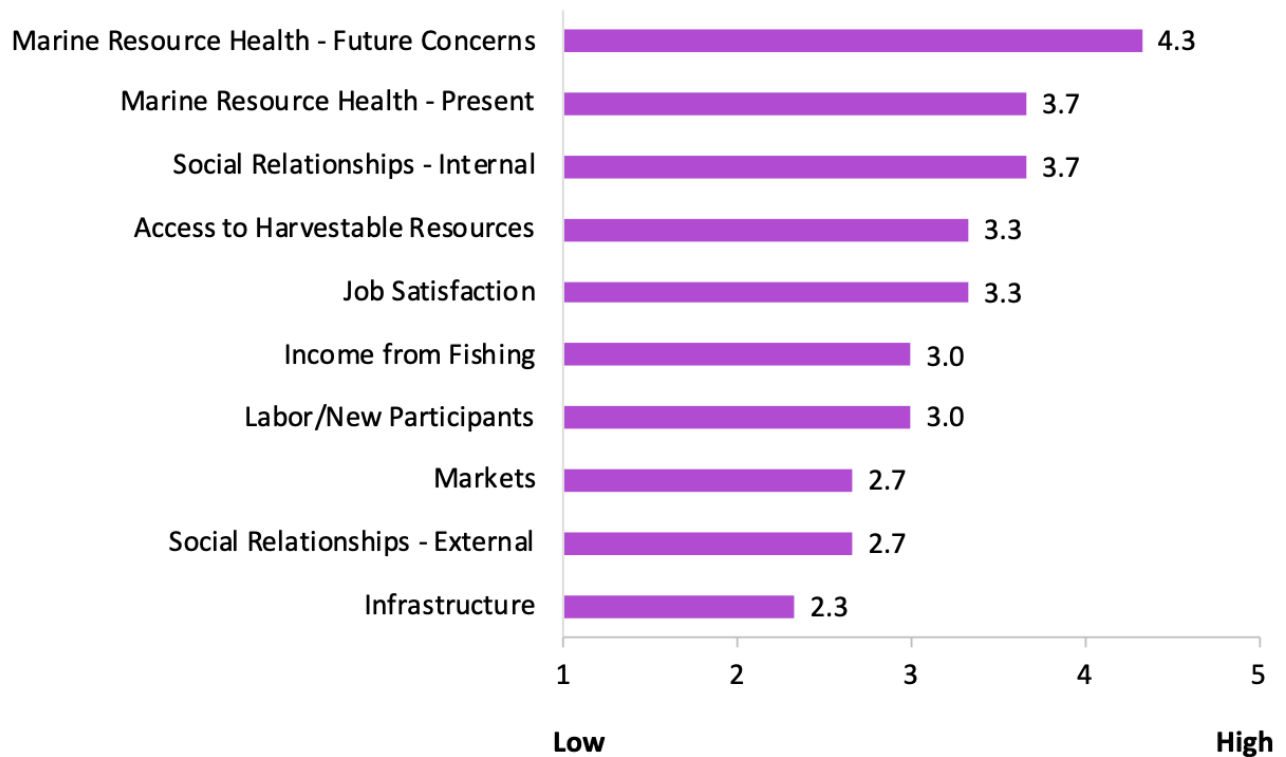
### Participant Quotes

“Anytime that you show a downward trend [. . .] someone's going to try to find a way to make you [not] be able to catch more and it may not be to your benefit. [. . .] Maybe we just need to sit and wait without [managers] taking something from us.”

“Doing things like this [focus group], like this MPA thing, you kind of wonder ‘okay, so we're going to devote our time and we're going to be honest and say all these things, but will it actually make a difference? Does anybody actually care, or are decisions already made?’ So that's sort of already in the back of your mind.”

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

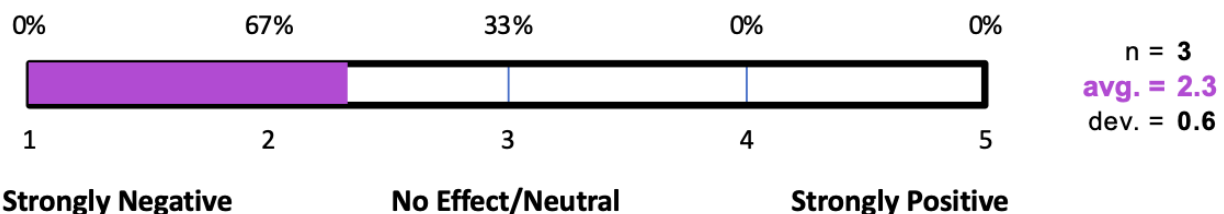
(Note: The following figure does not include the average rating for question 7. *COVID-19 Impacts*.)



## 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** Participants indicated the negative effects of MPAs on marine resources outside of the closures outweigh the improved marine resource health within the MPAs.

- One participant explained how sea cucumbers require high densities to reproduce, and that the MPAs have had a positive effect on the species because they are not being harvested.
- Another participant shared how the MPAs have had a negative impact on sea urchins because divers are forced into smaller areas. They believe sea urchin size and abundance would improve if fishing effort was spread across a larger area rather than compacted outside the MPAs.
  - Another fisherman explained how the marine resource health outside the MPAs is poorer because the closures have concentrated fishing pressure into smaller areas.
- One fisherman stated that the MPAs have had no effect on lobster populations because lobsters move out of the MPAs. They suggested that MPAs have greater benefits for rockfish than for lobster or crab.
- Another fisherman had difficulty rating the health of marine resources in MPAs because fishermen are not allowed in the closures. However, they anticipate the health of some resources has improved due to restrictions on harvests.

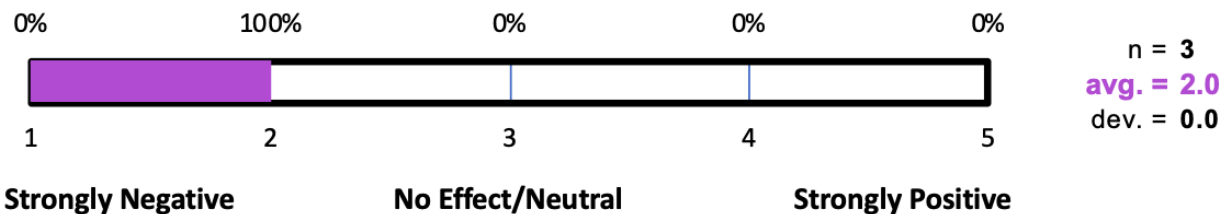
**Participant Quotes**

“I do think that MPAs are a good thing on a certain scale, like the science behind it and what we've seen, it's good to have little reserves to buffer the populations. For the sea cucumber fishery, I think that was really good, like those animals have to aggregate really densely to spawn and it's good to have some areas for them to do that [and] get no pressure whatsoever. So for that fishery, I would lean towards the neutral to positive.”

“With the urchin fishery, I think [MPAs are] a definite negative. [MPAs have] forced us into these small areas with so much compaction that we're all just running through the same rocks every week and measuring the same urchins. These urchins aren't going to move, they're not like lobster, they're not going to crawl across the line out there. They're where they're at and they're going to get big and grow over there [in the MPAs], and [in the] areas that are open, we're just going to keep measuring them down.”

“We're not allowed in those areas [MPAs], so we have no idea what's going on in there beyond reports from other people [conducting MPA monitoring]. Of course it's got to be doing better in there - it's not being impacted by commercial or recreational fishing.”

**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* on page 15 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** Participants shared examples of how the MPAs have had a negative effect on fishermen's livelihoods and fishing behavior.

- Several participants explained fishermen now need to travel further and around MPAs to access fishing grounds. They added that because of this, fishing trips that used to take one day now take up to two or more days.
- Participants also discussed how the MPAs have decreased the amount of area fishermen are allowed to access, which has resulted in crowding and compaction outside MPAs.
- One fishermen believed that while MPAs may have some positive effects on marine resource health, these do not outweigh the negative impacts on fishermen and livelihoods from fishing.

**Participant Quotes**

"You have an area that's an MPA that you know you have to travel across to get to another area. So you're really only going to go this far on a day trip. So if you want to go to the other side of the MPA you're going to be doing a two day trip. So then that area might get fished less because it's like, well, I gotta have a weather window for two days and all these other factors."

"We know the MPAs at least have the potential for some positive effect on the resource, but does that positive effect outweigh what it's currently doing to the fishery? And I think the answer is no, it doesn't outweigh the negative. [. . .] But it varies from fishermen to fishermen."

**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 identified several MPAs in and around the Ventura and Channel Islands area that have affected commercial fishermen. They noted that many of the MPAs in the area cover entire reefs, whereas in other areas (e.g., Morro Bay), MPAs only cover a portion of fishable area and fishermen are still able to access parts of reefs.

- *Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA) and Point Dume State Marine Reserve (SMR):* Several participants shared how these areas had good fishing habitat for rock crab and lobster and also had an abundance of kelp. The areas also protected fishermen from bad weather conditions.
  - Participants explained how they used to be able to travel to these areas on a day trip. Since this area is now an MPA, fishermen must go on overnight trips to travel around the MPAs to arrive east of Paradise Cove Pier where there are better fishing grounds.
  - With regard to safety, fishermen now tend to avoid the open area around these MPAs because they do not want to get caught in bad weather or have to travel back around the MPAs in the late afternoon.
  - Because fishermen have to travel further around these MPAs, they must use more fuel to get to their fishing grounds.
  - Participants also reported how there is greater compaction of fishing effort outside

these MPAs.

- *Anacapa SMCA and SMR*: Participants shared that because these MPAs cover almost the entire frontside of Anacapa Island, there is increased fishing pressure on the backside of the island which has also led to a concentration of gear. The frontside used to provide protection from bad weather, resulting in safety concerns since the area is no longer available.
  - One fisherman suggested that the closures around Anacapa Island be evenly distributed so that area on each side of the island could be accessible.
- *Scorpion SMR*: One participant described how this MPA closed off productive coves with an abundance of kelp, sea urchin, and sea cucumber, and that the area around the MPA is mostly sandy bottom. They added that this MPA may not look big on a map, but it covers a large area on the front east side of Santa Cruz Island.
- *Gull Island SMR*: Several participants explained how the area in the MPA used to be great for day trips and also provided weather protection on the way to Santa Rosa Island. They added that this MPA covers good areas for kelp and sea urchin.
  - One participant noted how older fishermen knew and studied the weather and tides in this area before it was an MPA, but that they had to relearn new fishing grounds elsewhere.
- *Footprint SMR*: One participant communicated how this is an example of a beneficial MPA because it helps with rockfish abundance in deeper waters but does not negatively affect the sea urchin or lobster fisheries.
- *Naples SMCA and Campus Point SMCA (No-Take)*: One participant gave the example that these MPAs restricted almost the entire Santa Barbara mainland coast from commercial fishing and how this demonstrates the variability of MPA impacts for different ports and regions in California. They added that these MPAs left mostly sandy bottoms, that do not house target fisheries, for fishermen to access and believed these MPAs should have been half the size each.
- *Arrow Point to Lion Head Point SMCA, Blue Cavern Onshore SMCA and SMCA (No-Take), Long Point SMR, Casino Point SMCA (No-Take), and Lover's Cove (SMCA)*: One participant asked that these MPAs bordering Catalina Island be considered for commercial fishing access since some sport fishing is allowed.

### Participant Quotes

"I think the Point Dume one - everybody misses that one; that's really good area there that's protected from the weather. So in bad weather, you could always go down there and scratch around and find some good habitat there. [The Point Dume SMCA] cuts off some kelp that's easily hittable on a day trip. And then going around the corner you got to go past that MPA and considerably further east of the Paradise Cove Pier before you get into some decent hard bottom. So by the time you are all the way down, that's kind of like an overnight trip. And comparing the habitat in [the Point Dume SMR] to the east of Point Dume [SMCA] - you compare that to the stuff east of Paradise Cove Pier, it's like apples and oranges. I mean, that reef is so good where they took it away and then all the way down to the east is not nearly as good. It's more low lying sand and stuff mixed in."

"Well, like Anacapa, like really? Take the whole front side of the island so we just keep annihilating the back. I'd rather close a little bit of the back, leave a little open on the front [. . .] I don't want to go urchin diving tomorrow, we have a hurricane swell in the water, so

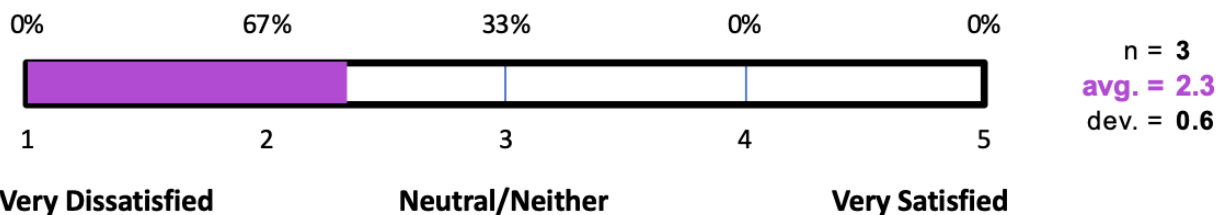


everywhere sucks on the backside. It's going to be rocking and rolling, man. If there was just a little corner of the front that I could go hide out and be out of the swell, that'd be so nice. But instead [ . . . ] I have to go dive areas that are less safe because they're open [compared to] where I could go someplace more protected. [ . . . ] I think [it would] be better for the resource to have a little bit of each side of the island closed instead of just all one [side] or the other."

"[Footprint SMR is] a perfect [MPA]. I mean, that is a perfect closure. It is not hurting anyone, it's saving rockfish. It's not affecting urchin divers. It does not affect the lobster fishery and does not affect the other fisheries, so I'd like to pay attention to that area [as an example closure]."

## 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 explained their dissatisfaction with MPA management, specifically that they do not see any management occurring.

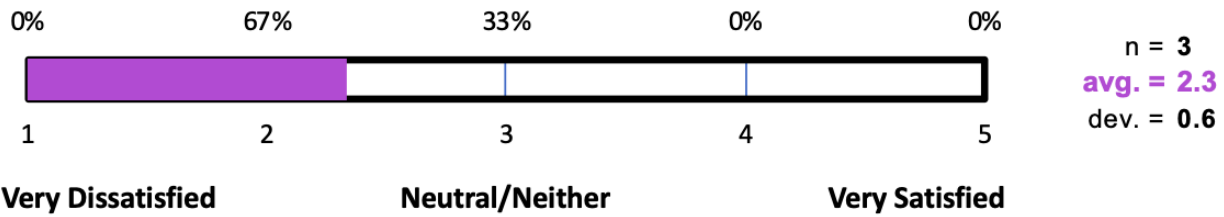
- Several participants shared how there has been no action with regard to MPA management following MPA implementation. One participant wondered who is responsible for MPA management, and another participant questioned why ongoing management has not been informed by learning through MPA research.
- One participant reflected on their involvement in the MPA implementation process and remembered being told that the areas that would be designated as MPAs would be reopened once marine resource health improved.

### Participant Quotes

"I was between two and one, so [dissatisfied and very dissatisfied]. If we're talking about the management, I [don't] see any management. I mean, there are the closures - done deal. Who is managing that?"

"A lot of these MPAs when, they were implemented, that was part of their sales technique was 'hey, we're going to close this and open it up and close something else, hopefully to better the reefs so it's more sustainable even after it's fished again because it's gotten growth on it.' So it's funny because I just look back at it - all the freakin' meetings and all the things I've gone to - and it just comes back to: they take something and then they're never going to give it back. So hopefully this [project] helps somewhat."

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

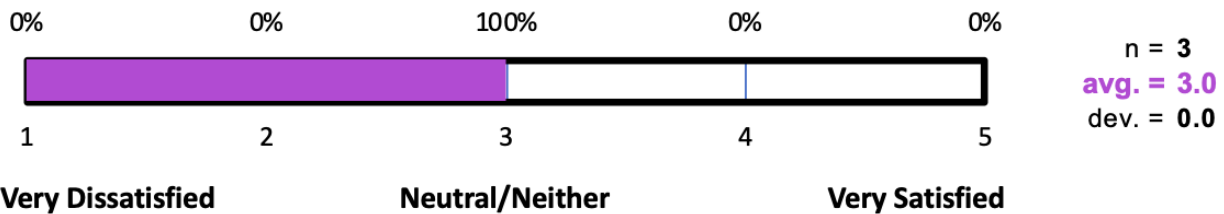


**Discussion Summary** One participant indicated that fishermen are unaware of MPA monitoring efforts.

**Participant Quotes**

“Did you do any testing, any diving, any research [in the MPAs]? No, none of [that has been done]. So it's hard to think about the management, if we do nothing with the closures. [. . .] Maybe we have a ridiculous amount of urchins [in] the area. We don't know.”

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



**Discussion Summary** One participant reported seeing MPA enforcement in the Ventura and Channel Islands area.

**Participant Quotes**

“I've probably been enforced. I didn't see any specific enforcement. [. . .] The Fish and Wildlife, they pass by the closures [and check if] all the traps are on the line and no one's diving in the closures.”

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

**Discussion Summary** Participants communicated several suggestions that they would like managers to know regarding MPAs and MPA management.

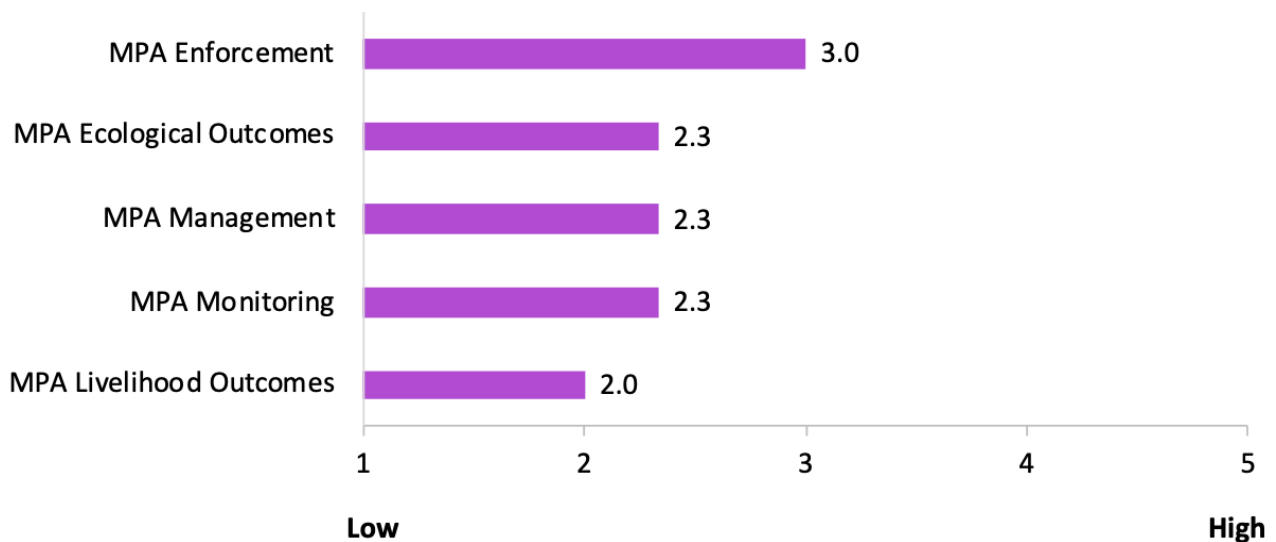
- Several participants recommended that the MPAs be rotated so that fishermen could access the marine resources that have been improved while other areas are replenished.
- Participants shared how they would like to see greater trust between fishermen and managers because fishermen continue to participate in studies such as this one yet do not see any changes or action based on what they say.

**Participant Quotes**

“I also look at the ability of rebuilding [an] area, but those areas need to be switched - rebuild that area, close another area, rebuild another. [The MPAs are] definitely propagating and doing very well for sure [. . .] but what comes out of it may not be beneficial unless we can get back in there and close something else and replenish something else. [. . .] I know it [the MPAs] help, but it can only help the fishery if we can get back in there. It's not going to help us otherwise.”

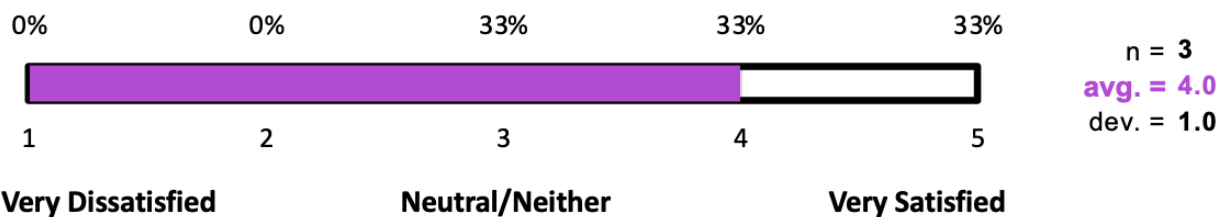
“I'd kind of like to throw that out to the managers like ‘hey, throw us a bone in the interest of good faith and building a relationship.’ I've been involved in fisheries politics for a while now and I've heard a similar thing from so many other fishermen where there's this distrust of management [. . .] The fact that we're participating on this call is because we're trying to put our best foot forward, we want to believe that things will be different this time around. But if we don't see anything change, then 20 years from now, 30 years from now when we're retiring and getting out of the business, we're going to be saying the same thing like ‘don't trust them, we did all this stuff, we tried so hard, and then we didn't get anything to show for it.’ So I think now's a really key time that if you, from a management perspective, do something for us, work with us, give us a little bit and see where it can go - we want to be a part of the solution.”

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



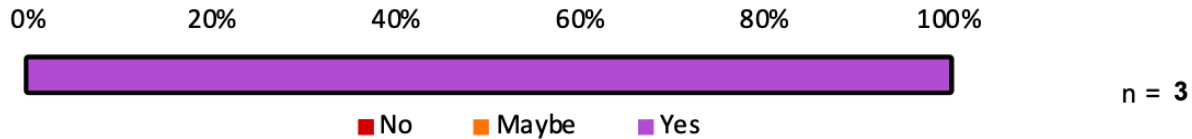
### Feedback on Virtual Process

**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 percent of participants who responded 'Yes' to question 20b. 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 virtual experience and shared that they would be open to participating in a meeting like this in the future.

- One participant appreciated the facilitation of the focus group but commented how they believed the questions were too broad which could lead to the responses being misinterpreted. They added that the effects from the COVID-19 pandemic could have influenced several of the responses, and that this should be noted when considering the information in this summary.
- One participant stated that it was nice to have theirs and other fishermen's voices heard on the call and appreciated the opportunity to speak with fishermen about the state of their fishing community.

**Participant Quotes**

"Just the possibilities of [the questions] being misrepresented, I'm not saying that they're going to be. But, I mean, I just know how people take things and twist them."

"You've done a very good job listening to us. It's nice to be heard and it's really nice talking to the other fishermen on this call and to get a perspective of how things are going in other fisheries, and [we] talked about things like strength of relationships and, yeah, I talk to a lot of the urchin and cucumber guys. I don't really talk to the lobster guys, so it's nice to get their perspective on things and see how we agree. So yeah, that was worthwhile - just meeting each other."