

Shellfish production could be coming to Ventura Harbor

Program would establish a new fishery of shellfish farms.

By Parimal M. Rohit

VENTURA — Ventura Harbor could become a little more crowded soon, as anglers and boaters there might be sharing space with a new shellfish fishery.

The Ventura Harbor Board of Port Commissioners was given a presentation on a shellfish production initiative during a July 8 workshop. County and harbor officials are currently seeking a \$300,000 grant to fund the initiative.

"The board was just getting an update from all the participants. It was productive," Harbormaster Oscar Peña said. "This is an excellent opportunity for the port district. The key is this would be a new fishery for the harbor. It's a very sustainable fishery."

Adding a shellfish fishery would complement the harbor's squid market and demonstrate the viability of commercial fishery in Ventura Harbor.

Peña added the process to establish a shellfish fishery would take 3 to 5 years.

The harbor has been looking into establishing the fishery since 2007, when the port district collaborated with the California Sea Grant program and University of California

Cooperative Extension to study and evaluate current and future fisheries at harbors at Channel Islands, Port Hueneme, Santa Barbara and Ventura.

"There was clearly a need for the Ventura Harbor to work with the commercial fisherman to identify new sustainable fisheries to off-load in the Ventura Harbor, other than California Market squid," harbor staff stated in a report to commissioners.

The initiative would be a multi-party collaboration known as Ventura Shellfish Enterprise and aim to bring sustainably cultivated shellfish to the market by 2020.

"The district supports the efforts of the Ventura Shellfish Enterprise to develop sustainably cultivated shellfish farms as a potential of increasing production of domestic shellfish for sustainable food supply independence," harbor staff stated. "Without reinforcing the viability of the commercial fishing industry in the Ventura Harbor, and improving the diversification of fisheries, the potential federal funding for dredging is potentially at risk in the future."

Harbor officials hope the fishery could serve as a model to cultivate



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shellfish at other waterfront venues along California's Central Coast and establish a viable invertebrate seafood industry.

The harbor is taking the lead to establish a shellfish fishery to help increase domestic production of seafood.

"It is widely recognized that the U.S. needs to boost domestic seafood production. At present, there is only one commercial aquaculture operation producing mussels in California waters (160,000 pounds per year)," harbor

staff said. "The current low level of production underscores the existence of significant regulatory and statutory barriers to commercial shellfish operations."

According to the proposed initiative, the harbor would "obtain entitlements for twenty 100-acre shellfish aquaculture leases in state waters of the Santa Barbara Channel" and establish best management practices for the fishery. The fishery would also be subject to monitoring and reporting requirements. Finally, county officials hope the fishery would leverage underutilized onshore spaces to process and ship shellfish

products.

The project ultimately hopes to raise awareness and knowledge of cultured shellfish as a commercially viable industry. A full operational shellfish fishery could yield 12 million pounds, annually, of cultivated mussels and sustainable market value of \$24 million, according to harbor staff.

Between 40 and 60 commercial fisherman could be employed by the fishery, with another 40 to 60 jobs in distribution and preparation, harbor staff added.