



MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brian Pendleton, General Manager
bpendleton@venturaharbor.com/805-642-8538

Jennifer Talt-Lundin, Marketing Manager
jtaltlundin@venturaharbor.com/805-477-0470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Ventura Port District Announces Key Decision
For Ventura Shellfish Enterprise Project**

VENTURA, Calif. – Over the past six years, through two successful Sea Grant awards, the Ventura Port District, in partnership with expert volunteers and consultants, developed extensive research of the Santa Barbara Channel for sustainable mussel farming.

The Port District sought to pre-permit 2,000 acres for Mediterranean mussels for the benefit of private aquaculture farmers – especially small commercial fishermen who lack the financial capacity to secure federal and state permits and approvals - to land product at Ventura Harbor.

This effort produced several technical studies, including a first-of-its-kind navigational risk assessment for a domestic aquaculture project, extensive engineering analysis for mussel farm design in open waters, numerous environmental studies and proposed monitoring plans, farm economic business and cash-flow model (i.e., proforma), and fiscal and economic impact analyses. The Port District plans on fully completing its Sea Grant tasks and responsibilities by August 2021.

On March 17, 2021, the Ventura Port District Board confirmed its commitment to completing its remaining Sea Grant deliverables and supporting National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Southern California Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA) process (which includes a study area for AOA consideration that is proximate to Ventura Harbor) in lieu of continuing to pursue permits for the proposed Ventura Shellfish Enterprise (VSE) project.

The AOA process is intended to accomplish many of the same goals as the VSE project, namely to engage in stakeholder outreach, site selection, and robust environmental review in order to reduce the costs and

regulatory hurdles associated with establishing aquaculture projects and developing additional sustainable sources of domestic seafood. While NOAA is still engaged in evaluating potential AOA sites off the Southern California coast, the Port District is strongly supportive of a location near Ventura Harbor.

NOAA has contributed scientific and technical expertise and has participated in various project studies to evaluate and inform siting potential locations for aquaculture in the Santa Barbara Channel. Another significant factor in this decision was a jurisdictional dispute between the Port District and the Ventura County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), which does not have jurisdiction over private applicants seeking to permit aquaculture farms in state or federal waters.

The Port District will continue to actively seek opportunities to collaborate with the aquaculture industry to establish sustainable aquaculture farms that can land product in Ventura Harbor and continue its vigorous advocacy at federal, state and local levels to do the same.

This decision advances the mission, goals and objectives of the Ventura Port District to diversify commercial fisheries with commercially and environmentally sustainable offshore aquaculture, strengthen Ventura's working waterfront, develop sustainable sources of revenue, provide jobs to the local and regional economies, and maintain federal dredging priority for Ventura Harbor.

The extensive stakeholder outreach and engagement, environmental analysis, and technical review performed in advancement of the VSE project has laid the groundwork for potential establishment and expansion of shellfish aquaculture in the Santa Barbara Channel. This information may be helpful to private aquaculture applicants in reducing the upfront costs of project planning and design and seeking regulatory approvals.

This Port District would also like to thank its partners that have assisted in making this effort possible, including NOAA, California Sea Grant, Coastal Marine Biolabs, The Cultured Abalone Farm, Ashworth Leininger Group, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Dudek, K&L Gates, Kelson Marine Co., and COWI, and looks forward to future opportunities to advance this important industry.

About Ventura Harbor:

Situated along the picturesque California Central Coast, endowed with breathtaking views, Ventura County's Ventura Harbor is bordered by the City of Ventura on three sides and the Pacific Ocean on the west, and houses some of the largest commercial fisheries in North America. Ventura Harbor has a total of more than 1,600 boat slips, over 35 unique shops and dockside restaurants, two waterfront hotels, residential properties, two boat yards, fuel docks, multiple private marinas, a public launch ramp, beaches, green spaces, water sports, and is home to the Channel Islands National Park, as part of a multigenerational destination. Ventura Harbor is 20 miles from Santa Barbara, within 15 miles of Oxnard and is 60 miles from Los Angeles International Airport. It is accessible in just minutes from scenic US Highway

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