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## HUMBOLDT BAY

# Board to vet shellfish expansion

Advisory commissioners say Coast Seafood project could impact eelgrass

By Will Houston

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The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors is set today to consider whether to send a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expressing concerns about Coast Seafoods Inc.'s proposed shellfish farming expansion in Humboldt Bay.

The letter was drafted by the board's Fish and Game Advisory Commission and outlines the commission's concerns about potential effects the expansion could have on eelgrass beds, wildlife and local fisheries.

"We are particularly concerned that the size and scale of the project will significantly impact ecological as well as economically

important components of north Humboldt Bay," the letter states. "Given the number of acres and the layout of the project, we are concerned the project will reduce the carrying capacity of the habitat essential for recreational and commercial fisheries such as Dungeness crab and Chinook salmon."

SHELLFISH » PAGE 3



Coast Seafoods Inc. is seeking to expand its shellfish farming operations in north Humboldt Bay by another 265 acres.

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## Shellfish

FROM PAGE 1

The draft letter is currently on the board's consent calendar, but is expected to be pulled for discussion.

Coast Seafoods' Southwest Operations Manager Greg Dale defended the expansion.

"It's pretty well-vetted and thought out," Dale said. "You can't make everybody happy. By and large, it's a pretty decent project, it's got monitoring and advisory committees with experts that advise the process as it moves forward."

Dale also expressed frustration that he was not afforded an opportunity to give a presentation to the commission about the revised project before the commission made its request to the board last week.

### Expansion concerns

Coast Seafoods — owned by Pacific Seafood Group — is seeking to add about 265 acres of shellfish aquaculture to their current 300 acres in north Humboldt Bay.

The project has already been approved by the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation Dis-

trict, but must also gain the approval of both the Army Corps of Engineers and the California Coastal Commission.

Fish and Game Advisory Commissioners Ted Romo and Harry Vaughn said they believe Coast Seafoods has not conducted enough research on how the expansion could impact black brant geese, which rely on eelgrass as a primary food source when migrating from Mexico to the Yukon territory.

"Once the (eelgrass) habitat has been destroyed, you can't put Humpty Dumpty back together again," Romo said.

Romo, who is also a member of the California Waterfowl Association Rules and Traditions Committee, said these concerns have been raised by the National Audubon Society as well as some local hunters. The commission's letter also drew from concerns raised by the county Planning and Building Department in the project's environmental impact review, Romo said.

Vaughn said that Coast Seafoods should conduct about five years of studies on the nutritional value of the eelgrass to establish baseline data so they can later determine how oyster

farming could impact the black brant population.

"There are a lot of unknowns," Vaughn said.

Dale said he is planning to attend today's board meeting to address the commission's claims, some of which — such as that the project would impact Dungeness crab and Chi-

nook salmon fisheries — he said are "inflammatory."

"(The commissioners) are still operating on misinformation," Dale said.

Dale said he gave a presentation to the commission about the expansion project in April 2015 when the company was still seek-

ing to expand by 620 acres. The expansion size was decreased and split into two phases after concerns were raised about the potential impacts to eelgrass.

The first phase would have the company expand by nearly 165 acres. After three to five years of monitoring the impacts of its operations on eelgrass beds, the company would then create an adaptive management plan based on its findings and then expand by another 91 acres.

"If the assumptions of the project are not met, then there is adaptive management. It's not an administrative permit like a pot





THE TIMES-STANDARD FILE

The Humboldt County Fish and Game Advisory Commission has expressed concern that expansion of oyster farming in Humboldt Bay could impact eelgrass beds.

farm," Dale said, referring to a proposed medical marijuana cultivation permit in outer Fortuna that has been a topic of recent controversy.

The company would also remove about 65 acres of existing shellfish farming area in order to mitigate any impacts to eelgrass.

The commission's letter comes after the harbor district's Board of Commissioners approved Coast Seafoods' project application and associated environmental impact review in late February. Last month, the Fish and Game Advisory Commission had requested the harbor district remove a sentence in Coast Seafoods' environmental document that mentioned

Dale's 2015 presentation to the commission.

Romo said the sentence implied the commission was giving "credence" to the project. Romo said the district refused this request, which led to the commission's to draft the letter

to the Army Corps of Engineers.

### Noticing issues

Dale said that he has been working since November to present on the revised project to the advisory commission, but said he has not been able to because of commission meeting noticing issues. For instance, the discussion item at the commission's March 21 meeting where it voted to

bring the letter before the Board of Supervisors was just labeled as "Oysters."

Humboldt County 3rd District Supervisor Mike Wilson said that this is not the first time the commission has had these noticing issues and that it results in the public being "generally excluded" from the commission's decision process.

"(The commission is) supposed to follow general Brown Act procedures," Wilson said. "I think without input from interested parties at the commission level, then it seems to me the commissioners aren't making a decision with all of the information."

Romo and Vaughn stated Monday that the commission meets every third Tues-

day of the month and that Dale also knew to contact the commission's secretary Nancy Kaytis-Slocum. Romo said that Wilson expressed disagreement about the commission's letter.

"We represent the community as a whole," Romo said. "We don't represent any particular one supervisor. We take people's input and if it sounds like it's important, we tell the board that they should take a look at this."

Kaytis-Slocum told the Times-Standard that she received an email from Dale on Sunday requesting to make a presentation to the commission before its letter goes before the board, but she said that the timing would not allow for it.

"The comments to the

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Board of Supervisors meeting

**When:** Today, 9 a.m.

**Where:** Supervisors' chamber, first floor, Humboldt County Courthouse, 825 Fifth St., Eureka

The full agenda can be found online at <http://humboldt.gov.org/167/Board-of-Supervisors>

Army Corps of Engineers are due on April 6," she said. "I'm not sure how we could accommodate him."

### Reappointments

Also on the Board of Supervisors' consent calendar is the reappointment of Kenny Priest and Vaughn to the advisory commission.

Both Priest and Vaughn are currently serving in Wilson's district, but the board is set to move Priest to the 4th District seat and Vaughn to the 2nd District

seat. Vaughn lives in Miranda and Priest lives in Eureka.

In the interest of full disclosure, Priest contributes a regular fishing column to the Times-Standard.

If these reappointments are confirmed, all three 3rd District commission seats will be open for Wilson to appoint, which is a concern for Romo.

"The word is out that the people Mr. Wilson will nominate may not represent the hunting and fishing community," Romo said.

Wilson said he requested Priest and Vaughn change districts so that he could make the most of his recruitment efforts.

"If I'm going to be asking for applications, it would be best if I could fill three seats instead of just one," Wilson said. "There is nothing political about it."

*Will Houston can be reached at 707-441-0504.*