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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **NOAA Seeks Public Input on Draft California Eelgrass Mitigation Policy**

NOAA's Fisheries Service is requesting the public's input on a draft policy published in the *Federal Register* that will provide guidance in planning, protecting and preserving eelgrass in California, one of the state's most important components for ecosystems in bays, estuaries, and near-shore coastal areas.

Eelgrass exists throughout the world and is considered to be one of the most productive habitats available to adult and larval stages of fish and plays a major role in erosion control and recycling of nutrients. NOAA Fisheries Service developed this draft policy to establish and achieve a goal of protecting this resource and its functions, including spatial coverage and density of eelgrass beds throughout California.

This draft policy will also serve as guidance within NOAA Fisheries Service's Southwest Region for recommendations concerning eelgrass impacts and management through Essential Fish Habitat consultations pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and through Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and National Environmental Policy Act reviews throughout California. This policy will inform NOAA Fisheries Service Southwest Region's position on eelgrass issues in other roles as a responsible, advisory, or funding agency.

The policy provides guidance to NOAA Fisheries Service staff and information to other federal agencies concerning avoidance and minimization measures, eelgrass survey methods, eelgrass impact assessment methods, and eelgrass impact mitigation. It is anticipated that the adoption and implementation of this policy will provide effective, statewide eelgrass protection and ensure that unavoidable impacts to eelgrass habitat are fully and appropriately compensated.

Public comment and information relevant to this draft mitigation plan may be submitted by any of the methods listed below but before 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, May 8, 2012.

**Email:**

*SWR.CEMP@noaa.gov*. (No files larger than 5 megabytes can be accepted)

**Mail:**

Korie Schaeffer  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
777 Sonoma Avenue, Suite 325  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
Attn: California Eelgrass Mitigation Policy Comments

**Facsimile:**

707-578-3435. Please include the following on the cover page of the fax: Attn: Korie Schaeffer/California Eelgrass Mitigation Policy Comments.

**For Further Information Contact:** Korie Schaeffer, at 707-575-6087

Electronic copies of this draft plan may be downloaded from the following internet site:

<http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/hcd/index.htm>