

Meeting Summary

Southern California Stakeholder Comments on the Development of a California Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Management Plan

A meeting was held at the Sea Lodge in La Jolla, California on March 20, 2003 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. The primary purpose of the meeting was to solicit ideas, concerns and suggestions from southern California stakeholders on the development of a California Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan. Sponsors were the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the University of California at Davis, Department of Environmental Science and Policy (UCD). Invitations were sent to over 450 individuals and included representatives of local water agencies and irrigation districts, tribes, various industries including the pet, aquarium, aquaculture and nursery/landscaping trades, live bait and seafood dealers, ports, marinas and shippers, and others with an interest in aquatic invasive species. Twenty five people attended with representation from the following organizations or businesses: California Department of Food and Agriculture, California Sea Grant, The Diving Locker, El Pescadero Caliente, Lake Mission Viejo Association, Live Cargo Reptile and Fish, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Pacific Coast Bait and Tackle, Palo Verde Irrigation District, Pauma Band of Mission Indians, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, Petco, Inc., Port of San Diego, San Diego Fish Society, San Dieguito Lagoon Committee, Scripps Institute of Oceanography, Southern California Coastal Water Research Project and The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii.

Mike Fraidenburg of Dynamic Solutions Group (DSG) of Olympia, Washington facilitated the meeting. He began by welcoming the group and gave a summary of the agenda and facilitated introductions. Ted Grosholz (UCD) discussed the ecological and economic costs of aquatic invasive species and introduced the goals and purpose of the meeting. Susan Ellis (CDFG's State Invasive Species Coordinator) explained the different roles and responsibilities of state agencies and current management activities for aquatic invasive species in California, and provided an update on the formation of the California Aquatic Invasive Species Council. Mark Sytsma (Portland State University, Portland, Oregon) discussed Oregon's experience with writing a state management plan for aquatic invasive species as well as the uses and limits of state plans. Holly Crosson (UCD's Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan Coordinator) discussed the process for the California plan's development and progress on the plan thus far. The rest of the meeting was spent discussing concerns and suggestions presented by the stakeholders. The format of the meeting was informal with Mike facilitating an open dialogue between participants and meeting sponsors. Most of the comments could be divided into the categories of Education, Prevention, Best Management Practices, Regulation, and General AIS Management Plan development. Below is a summary of specific comments made under each of these categories.

EDUCATION

1. A comprehensive strategy for AIS Education and Outreach should be developed
2. Education should be used instead of new legislation and regulation
3. More AIS information needs to reach the public, retail stores, industry, schools, etc.
4. Prioritize educational efforts based on risk associated with a given pathway
5. Piggyback onto current Agency educational programs
6. Consider "green labeling" to help consumers make the right choice; peer pressure will encourage appropriate behavior/decisions of others

7. Educational efforts need to take into account the multi-cultural nature of CA (signs, etc. need to be published in other appropriate languages besides English)
8. Marketing experts should be used to get a single, common AIS message out across the region
9. The AIS message has to touch people personally (an impact on the quality of life or the pocketbook)
10. Educational materials should be tailored to specific industry sectors (aquaculture, boaters, bait shops, pet/aquarium retailers, etc.)
11. The public as well as industry needs to know the economic cost of AIS (pay now or pay more later)
12. Stakeholders are a resource and can help with educational efforts (i.e., using Recreational Fisherman's Alliance, American Sportfishing Association, Diving or Tropical Fish Clubs, etc.)
13. Multiply educational efforts by identifying what industry sectors can do to help with AIS education and outreach; partner with pet/aquarium and other industries
14. Develop better ways to get the AIS message out, for instance, don't just have a booth at trades shows but work directly with promoters of shows (example – Fred Hall Show)
15. Publish articles in Western Outdoor News and similar magazines
16. Train people to use the AIS "Traveling Trunk" and have them take it "on the road"
17. A comprehensive AIS species list should be developed and publicized with appropriate contacts listed for experts associated with each species
18. There should be guidelines developed to help groups "self-regulate" and educate their constituents

PREVENTION (including Early Detection and Rapid Response)

1. An AIS Prevention Program is key to success but is not foolproof
2. AIS Screening and Risk Assessment Programs should not be overly simplistic or arbitrary. They need to be based on the best available information and sound science.
3. Volunteers can be an important piece in monitoring efforts for early detection of AIS
4. Training volunteers takes a lot of organization and keeping them motivated over the long term
5. can be challenging
6. Interaction with Watershed Councils is important
7. An AIS "hotline" is needed so new sightings can be reported immediately
8. Determine the economic consequences of pathway prevention
9. Look into funds available through "homeland security"

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMP's)

1. Develop guidelines for acceptable, humane and environmentally safe ways to deal with unwanted aquatic organisms (whether it be proper disposal, returning the organism to the retailer, or being "adopted" by someone else)
2. Industry and individuals need to accept a degree of economic liability and responsibility for their actions regarding AIS introduction and spread
3. Create industry standards to regulate and penalize the bad actors
4. Each industry should be actively involved in the development of their own BMP's. Weak industry initiative yields weak BMP's.
5. Industry documentation is needed to support accountability
6. Determine if BMP's should be regulatory
7. Develop BMP's for Bass Tournaments
8. BMP's need to maintain some flexibility and an acknowledgement that "one size does not fit all"
9. BMP's can help achieve buy-in, create institutional memory, give an outsider a way to monitor activities, and are already an accepted process in industry (similar to ISO example)

REGULATION

1. Enforce the laws and regulations we already have, rather than pass new ones
2. Provide positive incentives to encourage self-regulation
3. Provide better information about what AIS laws are currently in place and how to comply with them
4. A few bad apples are causing regulatory problems for all involved
5. Determine more effective ways to catch violators of current laws, including interstate transport
6. Improve current regulations. Piranhas and snakeheads were used as examples of species that are regulated but still are imported and released. We should learn from these experiences and attempt to prevent similar situations.

GENERAL AIS MANAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

1. Coordinate with the National Marine Sanctuaries on plan development
2. Work with California Sea Grant to achieve success in plan implementation, especially with education and outreach strategies and actions
3. Be creative with funding and partnerships
4. Leverage resources by doubling up on surveys, inspections, etc. that are already being done
5. Continually evaluate and update the plan and make sure the plan's goals are being realized (develop a scorecard)
6. Make sure the functioning of the California Aquatic Invasive Species Council is evaluated so it does not outlive its useful purpose. If changes are needed to make the council more effective, they should be able to be promoted through other agencies and the general public
7. Take steps to minimize the loss of dollars through overhead
8. Do not set the stage for failure by creating a timeline that can't be met
9. Involve economists if possible (can a dollar figure be put on habitat/resources?)
10. Make it clear who will determine priorities in the plan and what gets funded
11. Incorporate Watershed Councils in the planning effort
12. Make the relationship between the plan and AIS policy clear
13. Determine how plan implementers will interact with on-the-ground managers
14. Write the plan so that it facilitates funding for implementation
15. The plan should be user-friendly
16. Plans should promote accountability so that managers have an incentive to perform and meet commitments