

2024 DC Meeting Report

Prepared by Yvonne Kimball

Meeting Dates: February 12 to 16, 2024

City Delegation: Mayor Carla Wixom, Mayor Pro Tempore Landrum, City Manager Yvonne Kimball

Purposes:

Participate in CMANC meetings at DC – It’s a 25-year tradition that CMANC members travel to DC connecting to meet with federal agencies and advocate for California’s harbors and ports; while in DC, Morro Bay delegation also coordinates with city’s federal lobbyist to advocate for City specific interests, including:

Harbor needs and interest - continued funding for dredging, T-pier and other infrastructure, Morro Bay commercial fisheries, marine lives, estuary, sanctuary

Infrastructure needs in light of storm damages focusing on revetment and seawall repairs

Update on Offshore Wind activities at Morro Bay, community feedback, and city’s needs for capacity to evaluate environmental, technical and social economic impacts

Update on WRF as the project received federal grants and loans.

Meeting Summaries and Highlights:

Tuesday, February 13

1. Meeting with Carissa Bunge, Policy Advisor on Environment and Public Land; Matthew Ceja, Policy Advisor for Energy, Transportation and Climate
Office of Laphonza Bulter, US Senator

This was a meeting jointly scheduled by CMANC lobbyist (Carpi & Clay) and city’s lobbyist (The Ferguson Group). This meeting met both CMANC goals and city’s needs. We discussed the need for continued earmark support to harbor dredging and funding to repair T-pier.

Understanding Senator Bulter is leaving the Senate seat upon completion of this term, we

wanted to ensure that earmark dollars will be supported by her office as it has been critical for California harbors, including Morro Bay.

We also discussed the uniqueness of Morro Bay, including being a small working harbor for commercial fishermen, national estuary being one of the few in the nation, harbor infrastructure that needs repair after storm damages. We pointed out that the US Coast Guard is stationed in our harbor, which would help Morro Bay securing funding for dredging. Given their roles and expertise, it was appropriate to touch upon the potential OSW initiative impacts on the community, harbor and our fishery industry. They appeared to be surprised by Morro Bay's close connection to OSW innovation. Additionally, Mr. Cajé came from Cayucos and was familiar with city's culture. He asked about the WRF project and we gave an update. Mr. Cajé told us that his colleague had enjoyed a visit to Morro Bay's harbor and the new wastewater reclamation plant.

The meeting ended by Ms. Bunge and her colleagues expressing their commitment to continue supporting earmark funds for needed projects, like dredging and other things that we had brought up. They also indicated that they were aware that fisheries were not supportive of floating OSW.

2. Meeting with US Army Corps of Engineers, South Pacific Division

This was a meeting jointly scheduled by CMANC lobbyist and city's lobbyist. Meeting discussions met both CMANC goals and city's needs. We discussed the need for harbor dredging and funding to repair T-pier, and revetment.

Regarding dredging, we received money from previous years. The back bay dredging is delayed due to steelhead salmon migration from Chorro Creak. Army Corps of Engineers along with other agencies are tracking the salmons and other endangered species. The dredging is delayed to late 2024 and hopefully contract will be awarded in 2025. Given many steps of a dredging operation, mobilization logistics and cost are considerations that could further delay process.

We also asked ACE about Morro Bay harbor's revetment and seawall repairs following last year's extensive storm damages. We pointed out that the infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Revetment was originally built by Army Corps of Engineers. US Coast Guard is still stationed in Morro Bay. SPD division administrator Susan Lucus shared that if the seawall was built 50 years ago or before, to rebuilt or repair could qualify for a large project which could qualify for federal funding with a 25% to 35% local matching. Our lobbyist said he would follow up on that information.

3. Meeting with Director Elizabeth Klein, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

This meeting was arranged by city's lobbyist, focusing on harbor health, environmental issues and OSW initiative. We talked about marine life management, protecting fishery interest, BOEM's sanctuary designation process. BOEM acknowledged that there is no other city like Morro Bay in terms of our location and being a host of floating OSW initiatives. Three

leaseholders have gained leases off Morro Bay's coast. BOEM director said that they were cautious of next steps in the central coast and mindful of lessons learned from the east coast. We talked about the need for early stakeholder engagement in Morro Bay. BOEM said Department of Energy and NOAA are also regulatory agencies. They acknowledged that MB should have some help to navigate the OSW innovation activities. However, they have no funding to share. But they will keep Morro Bay posted in their stakeholder engagement efforts.

Later that week, I met with two reps from BOEM at a CMANC function. They both are assigned to Morro Bay wind areas. One has reached out.

Wednesday, February 14

1. With Cong. Carbajal

We met Cong. Carbajal at his office. His Deputy Chief of Staff / Legislative Director Joanna Montiel joined us. We thanked him for earmark funding for dredging and T-pier repairs. We talked about possible revetment repair as a large project and relayed what learned from the Army Corps of Engineers the day before. He asked his staff to follow up. He understood that FEMA process is not effective for small agencies.

We also let him know that the commercial fishermen are very concerned of the floating OSW at this point. Cong. Carbajal was very aware of Morro Bay's uniqueness, including US coast guard presence, our native heritage, estuary and our commercial fishing history. He pointed out that the Sanctuary discussion is still unresolved at NOAA. City's need for capacity to respond to OSW needs was brought up. Cong. Carbajal advised us to continue to ask SLO County and the State to help and use available "civic tools" to let county and state know that Morro Bay community needs to be engaged and city needs resources to do so. His SLO office followed up this week.

2. Meeting with Bureau of Reclamation, Assistant Deputy commissioner Mathew Moucieri, Senior Counselor John Watts, and CGB Liaison Ankur Bhattacharya

We followed the same priority list. John Watts was the Chief of Staff for late Senator Dianne Feinstein. Senator Feinstein was supportive of harbor's dredging and T-pier fund. So we took time to thank Mr. Watts for that funding and remember his long-time boss.

Bureau of Reclamation provided funding for the city's WRF project. We gave them an update on WRF. Public Works Director, Greg Kwolek, joined the meeting remotely. Bureau of Rec staff indicated that they believe city's WRF is a good project and let us know about a new funding. Nothing to follow up at this time.

3. Meeting with EPA WIFIA staff Lesile Temple

This meeting was for updating WRF project. Greg joined remotely to provide an update that the project moves along to final closure. Ms. Temple visited site before and has been in very close contact with the MB team. She said the low interest loan would not change regardless of any future complications. I stated that the project is a huge project and with any mega project,

this one could run into complicated close-out. She acknowledged that it is a very expensive project for a small community like Morro Bay. She also said the loan interest rate MB received is so low that it was unheard of; the same low interest rate is no longer available. She also indicated that her office is interested in collaborating with city of MB to work up a success story article to showcase the project. Her office has reached out to Greg for news articles.

4. Evening CMANC social event

We met CMANC staff, CMANC lobbyists, and conference attendees. I learned that Ventura Harbor has real estate lease operation. They operate it in house with an excel spreadsheet to track lease progresses. They have a larger number of leases than us. They acknowledge that their system needs improvement but not sure there is money to do so efficiently. It sounded like Morro Bay.

I also spoke to a few folks about OSW and impacts on their ports. In general, other ports seemed to covet Morro Bay's location as the hub and focal point for floating OSW. Once we explained our uniqueness, including commercial fishing, native heritage, marine life, etc., they seemed to understand Morro Bay's complication; some offered to assist.

Thursday, February 15

CMANC

The CMANC delegation visited a total of 17 US representative and senator offices. My group visited 9 offices to speak to staffers except for the meeting with Cong. Kevin Mullin (CA-16). See the attached schedule (Group Red). Our messages were consistent – keeping federal earmark money for dredging, advocating for fisheries, and asking for funding flexibility for small harbors, like Morro Bay. The group also touched upon OSW and its impacts on the communities and fisheries. CMANC's advocacy voice was unified despite the differences among all ports, including sizes, budgets, purposes and culture. Port of Los Angeles, Port of Long Beach, and Port of San Diego are major ports, but they understand the importance of Morro Bay harbor, and include our special interest in the advocacy message.

During our visits to the Capitol, we also visited the offices of Cong. Rob Wittman from Virginia and Cong. Chellie Pingree from Maine respectively. Apparently, they have either jointly introduced or were supportive of a bill called "Keep America's waterfronts working Act" or H.R. 6641, which intended to protect fishermen's interests. This bill has gained national attention. CMANC wanted to express its support. Fishermen on the east coast and Morro Bay share commonalities.

CMANC has a message that big and small ports rely on each other. Port of LA, Port of Long Beach and Port San Diego need Morro Bay Harbor because no one port can do it all. CMANC connects small and large ports to advance a set of collective interests in federal funding and polices. I learned that in other states, the harbors and ports are the state dept of transportation's responsibilities. But in California Caltrans does not handle ports and harbors,

resulting in alliance efforts like CMANC. In addition to traditional dredging fund, CMANC's other area of focus include infrastructure funding, energy independence, aquaculture, fishing and recreation.

It was interesting to hear others' perspectives and their daily challenges. For example, the County of Los Angeles Community Development handles beaches in LA county. Their ocean front projects and operation are much larger in scale than ours, but facing similar frustrations, such as dealing with the coastal commission, and the difficulties of retaining employees. The City of Morro Bay has been a CMANC member for 25 years. CMANC administrator and lobbyist said they enjoyed working with Morro Bay, and offered to be a continued resource for us.

Attachments:

Briefings and handouts

Schedules