



# Local Seafood for Local Communities

5 Year Strategic Plan, 2024-2028

## Our Mission

To ensure sustainable fisheries,  
resilient communities, and a  
healthy ocean for years to come

# Our Origin Story

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In 2014, representatives from the fishing industry, the City of Monterey, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) **launched the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust (MBFT) to ensure that Monterey Bay’s coastal communities benefit from active, working waterfronts and local, sustainable seafood for generations to come.** TNC owned Pacific groundfish quota shares due to a previous investment, and they divested a quota portfolio to MBFT representing a significant volume of historical trawl fishing in the area. In this way, MBFT was able to secure fishing rights for the benefit of the Monterey Bay fishing community. Over time, we saw additional needs from other fisheries sectors, and evolved our program base to support a diversity of fishing interests and needs beyond the groundfish fishery. Today, we work to put more local food on local dinner tables, address challenges in every fishery that is important to our local fisheries economy, and encourage all fishermen to engage in participatory management.

# Our 10-Year Vision

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**Monterey Bay is home to a thriving fishing community engaged in sustainable fisheries, supported by local consumers, and contributing to a resilient regional food system.**

Our vision is that Monterey Bay’s waterfront is a thriving place of commerce and recreation, enjoyed by its residents and visitors alike. Healthy coastal ecosystems provide abundant local seafood that is in high demand and integrated with other locally sourced food systems. The waterfront infrastructure illustrates the port’s tradition, history, and respect for the coastal ecosystem, and serves a productive and agile local fishery ecosystem. Citizens appreciate and choose to buy fresh, local seafood products from markets, dock sales, and restaurants throughout the Monterey Bay region. The fishermen are active participants in resource management and act as stewards of the resource. Their knowledge and fishing data are used to improve regional science and management. The MBFT’s work contributes to long term fishing opportunities in our region.

## Our Values

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### Community-Led

The best solutions are built from the ground up, are inclusive and promote diversity.

### Sustainability

Resources should be sustained for future generations.

### Collaboration

Many creative minds and perspectives are better than a few.

### Stewardship

Cultivating leadership within the individual and the collective helps to balance profitability with conservation.

### Integrity

We consistently strive to act with integrity, serving the collective and demonstrating accountability and fiscal responsibility.

### Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

We will be allies and partners in healing our communities from past injustices, and celebrating the diversity of cultures, ideas, and knowledge present.

# The Context

**Monterey Bay is one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, home to one of the oldest and most active fishing regions in the United States**, offering a wealth of marine resources for the human communities around the Bay. Commercial fisheries for sardine, anchovy, salmon and groundfish (e.g., rockfish and soles) were the key economic drivers of this area for over 50 years. However, during the 1990s and 2000s, a series of federal and state laws such as the Sustainable Fisheries Act and California's Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) and Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) were passed that mandated a more conservative approach to fisheries management. **The total allowable catches for many species, and especially for the multi-species groundfish complex, were drastically reduced.**

Although this course correction was warranted to better manage US fisheries, the socioeconomic outcome for Monterey Bay's fishing communities was significant. The loss of fishing businesses and infrastructure that fishermen rely on has hampered the recovery of the groundfish fishery, even as stocks have been rebuilt. Despite assurances by government regulators that fewer fishermen in the fleet would increase revenue for those who remained, a different outcome emerged.

When the Pacific Groundfish trawl fishery was shut down in the early 2000s, rockfish and sole were no longer available to the market. The market category for 'white fish' was quickly **replaced by other available products such as imported, farmed tilapia and cod.** Despite attempts over the last 20 years by industry, marketing associations, and NOAA Fisheries, regaining market share has proven to be difficult as the fleet can not compete with outside prices and also faces higher operating costs. Additionally, climate change is disrupting fisheries and changing ocean ecosystems, resulting in increasingly dynamic shifts of abundance and distribution of key species, and additional **volatility in both resource availability and regulatory constraints faced by fishermen.** We face a highly uncertain future and must creatively and collectively face challenges to our governance frameworks in order to adapt and move toward climate resilience.

With the shutdown of the 2023 salmon season in California, multiple years of extremely limited Dungeness crab seasons, coupled with a new set of conservation challenges for several nearshore groundfish species, the financial viability of the fishing sector here has become increasingly vulnerable. Significantly higher operating costs, market competition, and regulatory complexity contribute to the struggle. At the same time, food from the sea is a historically, culturally, and economically important part of our food system. There are many efforts to support local agriculture and independent farmers, but the **MBFT is the only non-profit organization actively working in this region to raise awareness around sustainable local seafood and ensure the viability of the fishing community** during an increasingly uncertain and challenging time.



# Levers

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As we work to shift the current system to one that will allow our vision to be realized, we will need to influence key levers:

## Fishermen

We will invest in the success of local fishermen and empower them to increase their sales of fish locally. We can assist them if they choose to sell their own catch, or through direct marketing. We want to enable local fishermen to diversify their fisheries portfolio and engage in management forums.

## Regional Leaders

We will partner with the City of Monterey, Moss Landing Harbor Commission, and Santa Cruz Port Authority that manage harbor budgets to influence investments in infrastructure. Together, we can find opportunities to raise funds and apply them towards needed improvements to support local fisheries.

## Supply Chain Actors

We will influence local buyers, processors, and distributors to focus their businesses on local products. We can find, and leverage, incentives for these actors to buy, sell, and market local products over imported ones.

## Local Seafood Consumers

We will influence more local consumers to purchase local seafood. Rallying the support of the community to celebrate local seafood and fishermen may shift their attitudes and inspire them to engage with efforts to secure the future of Monterey Bay fisheries.

## Partnerships

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We will work in **close partnership with all stakeholders involved** with sustaining and building a healthy local seafood system, including:

- Existing and next-generation commercial fishermen.
- Others who work in the seafood supply chain including community-supported fisheries, processors and food workers, buyers and distributors, fish markets, chefs, restaurants, and other fishery support businesses.
- Emergency food relief programs that provide seafood to local families in need.
- Fishing families and others with a personal, cultural, or historical connection to commercial fishing.
- Consumers of Monterey Bay seafood.
- Tourism businesses and other agencies that depend on the value of a working waterfront.
- Environmental, governmental, and academic institutions that are working to advance sustainable fisheries.

# Theory of Change

When we build trusted partnerships with fishermen, seafood businesses and local leaders

then we can

Collectively advance the viability and profitability of fishing businesses

Secure modern infrastructure across Monterey Bay ports and harbors

Expand the availability and access of local sustainable seafood to the public

to ensure

Commercial fisheries and working waterfronts will continue to exist and we will continue to have food from the sea as a cornerstone of our local food system

## Impact Goals

Over the next 10 years, we will see that this change has happened, and that Monterey Bay is home to a thriving fishing community engaged in sustainable fisheries, supported by local consumers, and contributing to a resilient regional food system when:



### Consumption of local sustainable seafood has **doubled** in the Monterey Bay

region as evidenced by sales of three key species: chilipepper rockfish, sablefish, and grenadier in local grocery stores, restaurants, and direct-to-consumer channels such as dock sales.



### 6 key seafood businesses and 20 independent fishing vessels operating out of Monterey

Bay harbors confirm their sales to local entities have increased on average by at least 20%, and **net profits have increased** by an average of 5% per year.



**Every farmers market** in our region has at least one entity (fisherman or community-supported fishery) selling fresh, local seafood in season.



### The number of independent fishermen operating in our area doubles, from an average of

50 active vessels to **100 active vessels** participating in one or more fishing seasons each year, with a diversity of fishing vessel sizes and fishing method types, which is a key characteristic of resilience.



### At least 20% of the active fleet is directly **engaged in management** either individually or through

a functioning fisheries association representing the voices of the community.



### At least \$10 million has been invested in upgrades to **waterfront infrastructure** that directly benefit

the fisheries operations and the overall economy while helping coastal communities adapt to climate change.



A well attended and iconic annual **Seafood Festival** is a mainstay in the Monterey Bay area, hosted in rotation by the three harbors.

# The Next 5 Years

In order to move toward these 10-year targets, we will use the strategy below to guide our work over the next 5 years (2024 - 2028). We have chosen five strategic priorities as the most impactful areas of work that will help us move towards our 10-year vision. We will measure our progress towards our 10-year Impact Goals yearly to ensure we are on track, and adjust our strategies as needed.

## 1. INCREASE LOCAL, EQUITABLE SEAFOOD CONSUMPTION

Drive demand for local, sustainable seafood and make it more accessible in Monterey Bay communities.

## 2. STRENGTHEN LOCAL SEAFOOD BUSINESSES

Support the local seafood business sector to enhance their viability.

## 3. ENGAGE INDUSTRY IN MANAGEMENT

Cultivate stakeholder engagement and leadership in fisheries management, policy and conservation.

## 4. IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure the Monterey Bay region can support the long-term resilience of the fishing industry in a changing world.

## 5. STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE OF THE MBFT

Ensure that the organization has sufficient resources and capacity to carry out its mission.



## PRIORITY 1:

# Increase local, equitable seafood consumption

Drive demand for local, sustainable seafood and make it more accessible in Monterey Bay communities.



## Tactics

- Update the Local Catch Guide to enable consumers to find and buy fresh, local seafood in season.
- Host the Get Hooked dinner series and create a restaurant partnership program.
- Donate local seafood to organizations serving families in need of food assistance through the Monterey Bay Community Seafood Program.
- Partner with food relief organizations to provide seafood education, recipes, and cooking classes.
- Target a younger audience with youth seafood education, cooking classes, and ocean related art projects.
- Target Latinx communities with farmers markets, seafood tasting events, and translated website pages and outreach materials.
- Sell merchandise at events and online to generate a local seafood buzz.
- Partner with local agencies and harbors to host a Seafood Festival to celebrate local seafood and fishermen in our community.
- Produce updated videos for Monterey, Moss Landing, and Santa Cruz regarding seafood and where to buy for hotels, TV, and other advertising outlets.
- Establish a seafood nutrition partnership to increase consumption of seafood through a health motivation lens.

## Outcomes

- Increased public awareness about sustainable Monterey Bay seafood with general and specific audiences such as youth and the Latinx community.
- Built community connections with fishermen and the local fishing industry.
- Consumer demand and sales for local seafood increased as a result of developing new markets and updated marketing strategies.
- Food security increased while supporting the local fishing economy.
- Increased consumption of underutilized species such as grenadier and chilipepper rockfish.
- Consumers learned about the nutritional benefits of seafood and incorporated more local seafood into their diet as a result.



## **PRIORITY 2: Strengthen local seafood businesses**

**Support the local seafood business sector to enhance their viability.**

### **Tactics**

- Lease hundreds of thousands of pounds of sustainable groundfish fishing rights through our quota leasing program.
- Establish a direct marketing program for local fishermen to increase dock sales.
- Improve how we promote dock sales with tailored methods for each harbor.
- Highlight fishermen of the month with social media videos about their fishing operations and where to buy their fish.
- Directly support our local seafood economy by purchasing seafood from local fishermen and seafood businesses through the Monterey Bay Community Seafood Program.
- Connect storytelling about fishermen to the Local Catch Guide (put a face to the fish!).
- Partner with California Sea Grant to offer fishermen first aid, marketing and business support.
- Partner with California Farm Link and other entities to update and improve our Business Technical Assistance Toolkit and Succession Planning support for fishermen.
- Investigate the path to lease ocean bottom permits to support diversification and a local blue economy.

### **Outcomes**

- Increased fishermen's access to tools, information, training, finance, and technical assistance resulting in stronger sales and higher net profits.
- Dock sales in Monterey Bay expanded to offer a more frequent and consistent supply of fresh fish for area residents and visitors to enjoy throughout the summer months.
- Protected and utilized local access to groundfish fishing rights.
- Markets for local seafood were expanded, thereby supporting the local fishing economy.
- Supported and encouraged the next generation of fishermen committed to maintaining the sustainability of local seafood.
- Increased landings of underutilized species such as grenadier and chilipepper rockfish.



## PRIORITY 3:

# Engage Industry in Management

Cultivate stakeholder engagement and leadership in fisheries management, policy and conservation.



## Tactics

- Build leadership capacity and support fishermen attendance at state and federal management meetings through travel reimbursements.
- Provide a curated list monthly of important meetings, events, and issues for fishermen to engage regarding fisheries management and business support.
- Continue to support education opportunities for fishermen (e.g., MREP, First Aid, Business tools) with scholarship funding for at least three fishermen annually to attend MREP.
- Hold community meetings to facilitate dialogue among fishermen and with key leaders at local, regional, state and national levels as needed to ensure representation in fisheries issues important to our region.
- Host an annual Monterey Bay Fisheries meeting with our US Congress member(s).
- Facilitate collaboration between local scientists and fishermen in support of research and conservation efforts.

## Outcomes

- Built trust, collaboration, and partnership with fishermen and MBFT, and between and among fisheries stakeholders, managers, regulators, scientists, and conservationists.
- Strengthened industry stakeholders' capacity to participate in fisheries science and conservation and engage effectively in fisheries management decisions, resulting in their ability to more effectively advocate for solutions to maintain sustainable fisheries
- Ensured fishermen's voices are being heard directly by the right government officials at the right time to affect regulatory, funding, and policy actions at the appropriate level of government.
- MBFT has contributed to ongoing learning and sound policy for sustainable fisheries.



## PRIORITY 4: Improve Infrastructure

Ensure the Monterey Bay region can support the long-term resilience of the fishing industry in a changing world.

### Tactics

- Build a public and fishery stakeholder constituency to influence the Monterey City Council around funding fisheries infrastructure improvements.
- Update the 2013 Community Sustainability Plan and create a 'Resilient Monterey Bay Fisheries and Waterfronts Plan' by the end of 2026.
- Host a local "Future of Fisheries" summit that brings together fishermen, chefs, scientists, restaurants and markets.
- Conduct data gathering and assessment, make recommendations at a stakeholder summit to gather their ideas, create a new plan, publish the plan and share with elected officials.
- Facilitate a capital investment project with the City of Monterey to revitalize Wharf II.
- Participate in the Monterey County Food Coalition and other regional food systems projects to ensure improvements include fisheries and waterfront infrastructure.

### Outcomes

- Adequate infrastructure is in place to support a diverse fishing fleet.
- Fisheries stakeholders have been consulted to assess risks and develop tools to mitigate current and future impacts of climate change.
- Rebuilt and cultivated new partnerships with Monterey City Council, Moss Landing Harbor Commission and Santa Cruz Harbor in service of improving infrastructure.
- Connections and trust between the fishing community and local government strengthened.

## PRIORITY 5:

# Strengthen the Organizational Resilience of the MBFT

Ensure that the organization has sufficient resources and capacity to carry out its mission.



## Tactics

- Expand the Board of Directors and advisors to include members with additional expertise, including finance and fundraising.
- Update Board and staff recruitment process to address values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Hire and retain the best talent in key areas of executive leadership, development, program management, communications and community engagement.
- Increase the visibility and impact of our programs with the fishing community and the general public.
- Increase communication and collaboration with fisheries organizations in the region, state and nationally in alignment with our mission.
- Nurture current partnerships and forge new partnerships with mission-aligned organizations and funders, including more involvement with food system partners.
- Improve our financial and administrative systems for better fundraising performance, ease of use, and accountability.
- Increase individual donations year over year and grow a diverse funding portfolio.
- Develop and implement a plan for continuous evaluation, metrics, and improvement of the organization's programs.

## Outcomes

- The MBFT team has sufficient capacity to successfully implement all program areas, maintain communications, administer workflow productively and with life balance
- MBFT is a great place to work!
- An expanded Board of Directors has supported the financial well being of the organization through giving and by actively championing our work and cultivating ever-wider support in the community.
- The MBFT donor base has expanded to include the right mix of mid-high level donors.
- Data driven metrics inform new proposals and funding partnerships because our impact is clear to funders.



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