

PERMIT REEF

The California shellfish and seaweed permitting route

A one-page summary of the review steps on the Permit Tracker, in the same order. Time and fee ranges are what the agencies and published reports state. They are ranges, not quotes.

STEP 1 Siting & lease

Who may hold water, and on what terms.

CA Fish & Game Commission (CFGF) [State]

Lease approval and public-interest determination (FGC §15400). CDFW staff administers the four-phase application; the Commission grants the lease.

Applies to: New lease · renewal · species change — Published time range: 12–36 months — Published fee range: \$1.5K–\$10K
<https://fgc.ca.gov/>

State Lands Commission [State]

Tidelands and bottom lease interest where the site sits on state sovereign land.

Applies to: New lease · renewal — Published time range: 12–24 months — Published fee range: \$1K–\$8K + rent
<https://www.slc.ca.gov/>

Harbor / port district [Local]

Where a district holds granted tidelands (Humboldt Bay, San Diego), the district is the leasing and CEQA lead agency.

Applies to: Pre-permitted footprint — Published time range: 3–9 months — Published fee range: Varies
<https://humboldtbay.org/development-permits>

STEP 2 Environmental review

The analysis that has to exist before a decision can be made.

CEQA lead agency [State]

Initial Study, then a Negative Declaration or EIR. The lead is CFGF for state leases, or the district/county where they hold the approval.

Applies to: Most new and amended projects — Published time range: 12–48 months — Published fee range: \$60K–\$250K consultant
<https://opr.ca.gov/ceqa/>

California Coastal Commission [State]

Coastal development permit or federal consistency determination.

Applies to: Coastal zone projects — Published time range: 12–24 months — Published fee range: \$2K–\$15K
<https://www.coastal.ca.gov/>

Tribal consultation [Tribal]

AB 52 and SB 18 where triggered; in the Chumash Heritage NMS zone, ONMS §304(d) co-stewardship applies. Permit Reef treats this as partnership, not a checkbox.

Applies to: Where triggered by location — Published time range: 3–12 months — Published fee range: —
<https://nahc.ca.gov/>

STEP 3 Water & federal

Water quality, navigation, and protected species.

Regional Water Board (RWQCB) [State]

Section 401 water quality certification; waste discharge requirements for land-based systems.

Applies to: All in-water and discharging projects — Published time range: 6–18 months — Published fee range: \$500–\$5K
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterboards_map.html

USACE [Federal]

Section 10 / 404 authorization for structures and work in navigable waters.

Applies to: All in-water structures — Published time range: 12–36 months — Published fee range: Free–\$100
<https://www.spn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/>

NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) & USFWS [Federal]

ESA and MMPA consultation, essential fish habitat review.

Applies to: Where listed species or habitat occur — Published time range: 6–24 months — Published fee range: Free
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/consultations/esa-section-7-consultations-west-coast>

STEP 4 Food safety & product

What has to be true before anyone eats it.

CDPH — shellfish sanitation [State]

NSSP growing-area classification, harvest controls, certification, and tagging for bivalves.

Applies to: All bivalve shellfish — Published time range: 3–9 months — Published fee range: \$1K–\$5K

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/Shellfish/Shellfish-Program.aspx>

CDPH — processed food registration [State]

Processed Food Registration and HACCP where processing occurs. Seaweed as a food sits on partly unsettled ground — see Known Gaps.

Applies to: Seaweed and processed product — Published time range: 2–6 months — Published fee range: \$500–\$2K

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DFDCS/Pages/FDBPrograms/FoodSafetyProgram/ProcedureObtainingProcessedFoodRegistration.aspx>

County environmental health [Local]

Facility, water supply, and handling review for shoreside and upland operations.

Applies to: Land-based and processing — Published time range: 1–6 months — Published fee range: Varies

<https://www.ccdeh.com/>

STEP 5 Operate & keep current

The part that never ends.

CDFW — annual registration [State]

Aquaculture registration for every facility, every year (FGC §15101, 14 CCR §235, form DFW 750).

Applies to: Every operation, every year — Published time range: 1–3 months — Published fee range: ~\$500 base

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Aquaculture>

CDFW — stock movement & health [State]

Importation, transfer, and disease inspection approvals for seed, spore, and broodstock.

Applies to: Any stock movement — Published time range: 1–4 months — Published fee range: Varies

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Aquaculture>

Local use permit [Local]

County or city use permit, plus lease-condition reporting and monitoring obligations.

Applies to: Most shoreside footprints — Published time range: 3–12 months — Published fee range: Varies widely

<https://opr.ca.gov/planning/general-plan/>

Permit Reef charts the route and gathers what is published. It does not file anything, does not give legal advice, and does not speak for any agency. The agency's own notice remains the legal record. Coverage is California shellfish and seaweed only. Read the live version at permitreef.org/tracker/summary.