

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
Port of San Francisco Board Room
Ferry Building, Second Floor
San Francisco, CA 94111

June 1, 2015

Re: June 4 meeting, Item No. 8
WETA project in Alameda and the harbor seals

Dear Commissioners:

We are members of the “working group” assisting the Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA) in the process of establishing a new haul-out dock for harbor seals to replace the one to be dismantled by the construction of WETA’s new maintenance facility at Alameda Point. A new nearby location was identified on May 18 with the help of marine biologist and harbor seal expert, Dr. James Harvey. This project was approved by the Alameda City Council, which with WETA’s help passed a “Memorandum of Understanding” to plan and build a new haul-out for the seals.

We have read the “Application Summary” prepared by staff (dated May 22) for the maintenance facility permit and are concerned by some misleading statements about the harbor seals (made on page 13) and their behavior at Alameda Point.

The document vastly downplays the importance of the existing haul-out by vaguely alluding to the “small population of harbor seals” which “occasionally” use the present dock area as a haul-out. The fact is the harbor seals use the haul-out dock practically on a *daily* basis, and have been seen nursing pups there. Very often there are 5-10 on the dock, and sometimes as many as 20. We have abundant recorded observational and photographic evidence of this.

In contrast, we rarely, if ever, see any seals out on Breakwater Island, including the “western tip,” which is erroneously described in the staff report as a “popular haul-out.” One member of our group who does bird counting there reports seeing only four seals on the breakwater during the first five months of 2015. If you examine the structure of Breakwater Island, you can easily discern why the seals find it uninviting, as it is a steep pile of boulders that seal pups would have immense difficulty negotiating. In comparison, the old dock is flat and has a ramp sloping into the water, which is why the seals have chosen to go there in groups nearly every day, and not to the breakwater.

Experts confirm this old dock haul-out is the *only* seal haul-out in the East Bay between Yerba Buena Island and Fremont, and our records suggest the seals have been using it for over 10 years. This in turn suggests that the dock plays some important role in the seals’ survival inside San Francisco Bay, and for that reason it should be replaced with a new haul-out.

The staff report does not adequately characterize the commendatory and voluntary efforts of WETA on behalf of marine mammals. We applaud WETA’s offer to fund the construction of a new harbor seal haul-out and maintain it for the next 60 years. We look forward to future approval of the BCDC permit for the new harbor seal haul-out at Alameda Point, mindful of its ecological significance in the face of continuing human appropriation of wildlife habitat.

Respectfully,

Mark Klein, Alameda Point harbor seal monitor, former Marine Mammal Center harbor seal care crew volunteer

Irene Dieter, Sierra Club

Cindy Margulis, Golden Gate Audubon Society

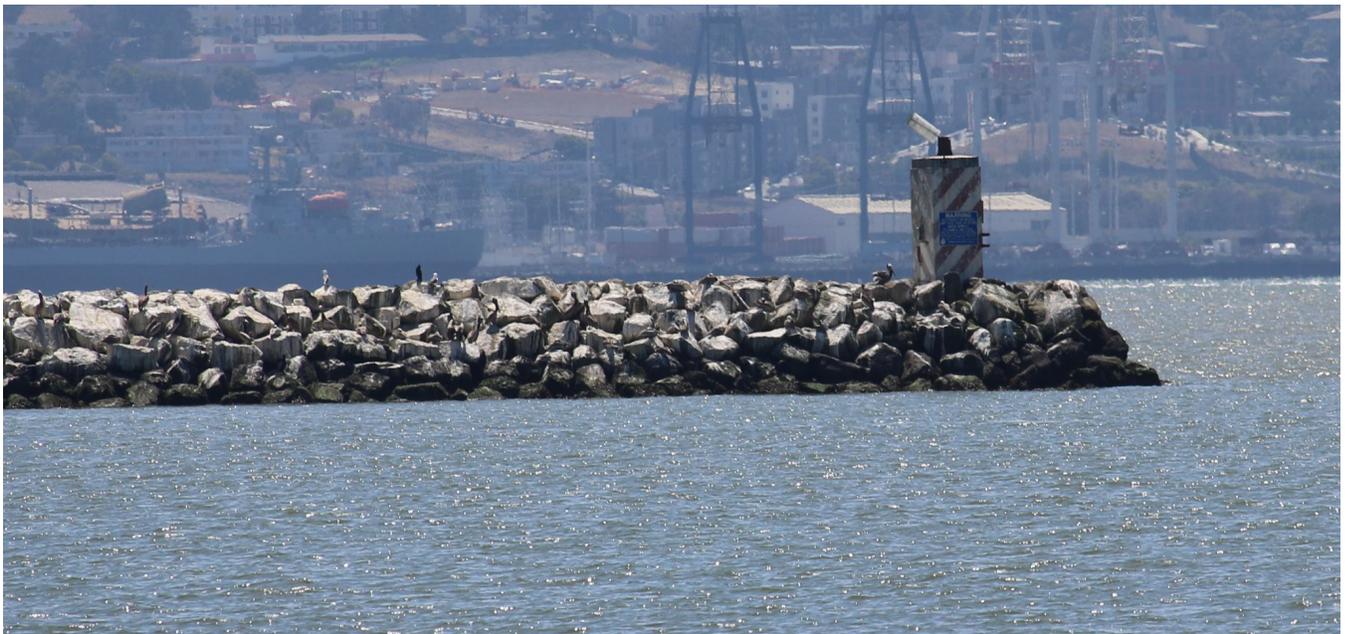
Leora Feeny, Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve

Richard Bangert, Alameda Point Environmental Report

Rachel Campos, Alameda Point harbor seal monitor



11 Seals Hauled Out on Alameda Dock, May 28, 2015



Western Tip of Alameda's Breakwater Island