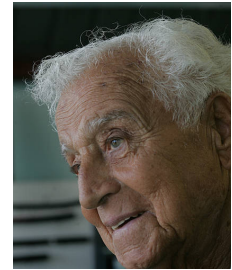


Hidden History Story

Measure D and Its Impact on Commercial Fishing in Morro Bay

Fishing has been at the heart of Morro Bay since it was founded in 1870.

Commercial fishing in Morro Bay can be traced back to the late 19th century. By the early 1900s Morro Bay was engaged in a growing commercial abalone fishery, and flourished with robust sardine, groundfish, salmon, and albacore fisheries as well as an active Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) fleet serving thousands of visitors and locals annually.¹



Joe Giannini, former Morro Bay Mayor and supporter of Measure D (Photo by Spencer Weiner/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

As Morro Bay thrived, the vital fishing industry became threatened by expanding tourism, such as shops, condos, and vacation rentals. The

Embarcadero felt the biggest effects, as restaurants popped up all along the waterfront.²

Many fishermen pushed back against the growth, feeling like their livelihood was at stake. The most vocal defender of preservation along the waterfront was former Morro Bay mayor and City Councilman Joe Giannini who persuaded voters to take action.³ “The docks along the waterfront have slowly proliferated away from the fisherman for 25 years” he states in a May 29th, 1981 issue of the local Morro Bay newspaper. “And with restaurant and recreational boat expansion in the bay, something must be done to protect a place for the fisherman.”⁴



Beach St boundary near the shutdown power plant towers Photo by Josue.

In 1981, Giannini proposed a new measure to protect fishing from encroaching tourism businesses with the help of another local fisherman, Ed Ewing. The proposal detailed that no new development could occur within the tidelands between Beach Street and Target Rock unless its primary use is commercial and noncommercial recreational fishing. It also stipulated that the existing businesses within that area not related to fishing could stay but they could not expand their buildings.⁵

Giannini and Ewing easily won the support of other fishermen but struggled to win over the citizens of Morro Bay. In May 1981 when it finally came to a vote, the town was littered with signs urging voters to reject the ordinance. The Central Coast Sun-Bulletin published an editorial opposing the measure and the Morro Bay City Council as well as the Morro Bay Business Association were pushing against its passage. Local fishermen did not grasp why they would fight the ordinance. Ron Baker, a member of the Fisherman’s Organization, highlighted that Measure D would be beneficial for the whole town and would

¹ 2015 *ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT WORKING WATERFRONT EDITION*. Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc., July 2015, www.morro-bay.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/7690/LWC_MB-Econ-Impact-Report-2014_Final?bidId=

² Chawkins, Steve. “Morro Bay Fishing Fleet Losing a Rock.” Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 11 Mar. 2006, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-mar-11-me-morrobay11-story.html.

³ “Joseph Giannini.” Old Morro Bay, www.oldmorrobay.com/giannini.html

⁴ Ryan, Tim. “As Election Nears, MB Fishermen See Defeat.” 31 May 1981.

⁵ Ryan, Tim. “Morro measure to shield fishing” 29 May 1981.

increase tourism, saying “for every \$1 we bring here in fish, it generates an additional \$5.”⁶ The opposition to the ordinance felt that by reserving an area of the Embarcadero for fishing, it could jeopardize the town’s coastal conservancy grants, in a newspaper article from May 31st, 1981 that “the area is already designated for sportfishing and the proposed zoning is unneeded.”⁷ They also voiced concerns that it would force existing businesses in the area to move. At the time Measure D was proposed, there were four restaurants and a gift shop within the boundary, though the proposal specified they would not have to move, only that they could not expand.

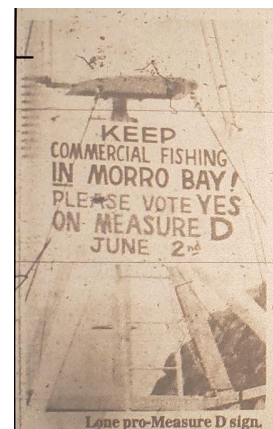
Measure D was unanimously rejected by the City Council when it came to a vote in February of 1981, but after Giannini circulated a petition calling for the rezoning of the half-mile stretch of waterfront, the City Council agreed to a special election held June 2nd, 1981. Fishermen of Morro Bay rejoiced as Measure D passed and they felt assured the fishing industry would not die out.⁸



View of Morro Rock from Beach St. Photo by Josue.

More recently, the City Council has called for the revision of Measure D, once in 2008 by the City Council⁹ and once again more seriously in 2016 by the Planning Commission of Morro Bay.¹⁰ In 2008, the call for change came after two businesses within the restricted area expressed the desire to renovate. The proposal included changes that would allow fishing related businesses more freedom to expand, especially in retail. Officials hoped that the revisions would boost the declining economy in Morro Bay with more tourism, specifically with passenger-for-

hire boats that could offer tourists an up-close view of the harbor. This time, fishermen were less fervent in their fight for Measure D. Jeremiah O’Brien, a member of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Association said “we are not averse to a wording change... that did not encroach on the commercial fishing industry.”¹¹ Though many changes have been proposed since it originally passed in 1981, Measure D is still the same as when Joe Giannini fought for its passage. According to Robert Red Davis, a Morro Bay City Council Member, “because the zoning change was done through a ballot measure, the only way to change that particular zoning section is through the ballot process,”¹² meaning Measure D will stay, at least for a little while.



Pro-Measure D

⁶ Ryan, Tim. “Morro measure to shield fishing” 29 May 1981.

⁷ Ryan, Tim. “As Election Nears, MB Fishermen See Defeat.” 31 May 1981.

⁸ Ryan, Tim

⁹ *Harbor News Volume 8, Issue 4*. City of Morro Bay Harbor News, 2008. morrobayca.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/78.

¹⁰ “ISSUES.” Robert Red Davis, robertreddavis.com/issues/

¹¹ Patel, Sona.

¹² “ISSUES.” Robert Red Davis, robertreddavis.com/issues/



Today, the region protected under Measure D is mostly unchanged. There are still four restaurants in the area: the Great American Fish Company, the Harbor Hut, Tognazzini's Dockside Restaurant, and Crill's Salt Water Taffy. Tourists and locals can still wander along the docks, getting a front-row seat to watch commercial fishing in Morro Bay. The industry that helped Morro Bay to thrive may not be as successful or as bustling as it was in its heyday, but it still supports the people who live there thanks to the preservation of fishing under Measure D.

View of fishing boats near Harbor Hut Restaurant. Photo by Josue.

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