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## The Palos Verdes Kelp Restoration Project

Tom Ford

*Loyola Marymount University*

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## **Faculty Pub Night – Spring 2017**

Date: January 24, 2017

Speaker: Tom Ford



### **About the Author**

Tom Ford is Executive Director of The Bay Foundation, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Authority, collectively comprising the Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program. He is a Co-Director of the Center for Santa Monica Bay Studies at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), and part time faculty at LMU's Fred Seaver College of Science and Engineering. Holding a M.A. from UCLA in Marine Ecology and a B.A. from the University of Rhode Island in Biology, Tom has been engaged in the study and restoration of kelp forests since his 1998 move to LA. Other current projects include aerial surveys of southern California coastal waters, abalone restoration, abalone genetics and disease risk management, sea urchin gonad indices, and Biological monitoring of Marine Protected Areas. Tom serves on the Board of Directors of the Southern California Marine Institute and Southern California Academy of Sciences, as well as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Oil Spill Prevention and Response Technical Advisory Committee and the City of Santa Monica Clean Beaches Clean Ocean Committee. He has dedicated thousands of hours to understanding and correcting sources of pollution in Los Angeles, influencing national and international policies and practices that benefit the environment and public health.

Tom's diverse background spans the Atlantic seaboard where his research on sea turtles involved nesting beaches, aerial surveys and coastal dredging projects. As a commercial shell fisherman in Rhode Island, he developed his deep appreciation for the working landscapes that our coastal waters comprise.

### **About the Author's Work**

Since 2013, The Bay Foundation has lead a team of partners, including fishermen and researchers to restore 150 acres of kelp forest off the coast of Palos Verdes. This project increases the resiliency of the Los Angeles Coast in relationship to climate change stressors while retaining local jobs and increasing

local seafood production. This project has been Tom Ford's passion for over 15 years and many LMU students have conducted lab work to support his research.

Historically, Palos Verdes was wreathed by 100s of acres of beautiful kelp forest, supporting hundreds of species of fish and invertebrates. Kelp forests are considered the "rainforests of the sea", and are popular destinations for fishing and wildlife viewing. One specific fishery for sea urchin, used for "uni" in sushi dishes, is worth millions of dollars a year, collecting sea urchins from kelp forests in southern California alone.

Unfortunately the kelp forest off Palos Verdes has decreased by 75% in the past 100 years. What was once kelp forest is now "urchin barren," where over-populous purple sea urchins, of no value to fishermen, eliminate the kelp and crowd out most other life. The partners have spent thousands of hours SCUBA diving to transform the urchin barrens back to productive and stable kelp forest. Creating a revitalized habitat that benefits wildlife, people and businesses. The project has captured the attention of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US Environmental Protection Agency, and international interest in Canada, Japan and Norway.