



RBRA: What Made It Work

Success Factors & Lessons Learned

Richardson Bay Regional Agency | March 2026

The Problem: 240+ Vessels in Richardson Bay

What the bay looked like — and why earlier efforts failed

- ▶ **Peak 2016: 240+ illegally anchored vessels**
- ▶ Anchor chains scoured hundreds of acres of eelgrass — the bay's ecological foundation
- ▶ Most vessels lacked working heads, safety equipment, or electrical systems
- ▶ Decades of symbolic enforcement — legal challenges, political opposition, jurisdictional gaps
- ▶ No clear vision, goals or direction
- ▶ A need to update RBRA Action Plans, Codes, Ordinances and Citations
- ▶ **No binding deadline. No housing alternative. No clear enforcement trigger.**

Success Factor 1: External Accountability

The 2021 BCDC Settlement Agreement — the single most important structural driver

KEY DRIVERS

- 2019 BCDC threatened direct enforcement against RBRA for Bay Plan violations.
- 2020 RBRA updated their Transition Plan providing Vision, Goals, Principles and Policy Direction
- 2021 Eelgrass Protection and Management Plan

The 2021 binding RBRA/BCDC settlement established:

Hard deadline: Oct 26, 2026

All vessels out of anchorage

Quarterly BCDC Enforcement Committee briefings
— external oversight & accountability



Transformed abatement from discretionary to legally obligated which first required updated RBRA codes and citation program



External oversight maintained sustained pressure over 5 years



Regular BCDC briefings created a public accountability loop

A consistent and methodical approach was adopted for everything starting with early notices and all the way through progressively elevating enforcement and ultimately concluding with Nuisance Abatement (Impound) Warrants

Success Factor 2: The Eelgrass Protection Zone and Designated Anchorage

A spatially defined, unambiguous enforcement trigger

EPZ and Designated Anchorage— 5 pile signs + 5 floating buoys

- ▶ Vessel in EPZ = unambiguous violation. No debate about the 72-hour clock.
- ▶ Pile signs and buoys physically installed October 2024 — eliminated the 'I didn't know' defense and clearly demark the EPZ and Designated Anchorage
- ▶ **EPZ vessel count: 100+ (2022) → 1 (March 2026)**
- ▶ 10-day EPZ enforcement cycle vs. standard 30+ days: citation → appeal → nuisance abatement hearing

Success Factor 3: Voluntary Exit Programs- Vessel Buyback

Buying out the problem — faster and cheaper than forced removal every time

\$150 / linear ft

Vessel Buyback Rate

44 vessels retired. \$270,000+ disbursed. Owners of derelict boats have no practical alternative — this program creates one.

HNC §526.1

Surrendered Vessel Pathway

Voluntary surrender bypasses the full §526 procedural gauntlet — no 60-day notice, no contested hearings. Faster, cheaper, legally cleaner.

Early Intervention

Don't wait for derelict

RBRA monitors, cites, and escalates on a defined schedule. Proactive: ~\$2K-\$6K vessel vs. ~\$20K-\$250K for a sunken vessel that contaminates the environment.

Success Factor 4: Addressing the Human Dimension

The Temporary Housing Support Program — \$3M state grant (Sen. Mike McGuire, FY23)

Why this matters:

- ▶ Many anchor-outs are people in housing crisis
 - ▶ Housing placement directly linked to vessel removal — one doesn't happen without the other
 - ▶ Proactively reduces legal challenges, media scrutiny, and political opposition
 - ▶ Partners: Marin Housing Authority, Marin H&HS, Episcopal Community Services
- ▶ **LESSON: Partner with county human services BEFORE launching enforcement escalation**

27 Individuals Housed

~\$2,500/mo Housing Voucher

51 Housed via All Programs

Success Factor 5: Multi-Agency Relationships

Build the network before you need it — not during a crisis

BCDC
Binding Settlement
Oct 2026 Deadline
Creation of the EPZ and
Designated Anchorage

US EPA
\$2.8M Eelgrass
Restoration Grant

DBW SAVE Grants

NOAA
Marine Debris Removal
Grants

RBRA
The right staff at the
right time

US Army Corps
Facilities and Operations
Support

State of CA \$3M Grant to
Support Housing Program

Local Agency
Marine Patrol
Enforcement Support and an
Early and Prolonged
Notification Program

These relationships were built over years of consistent engagement — not assembled during a crisis.

Why Others Struggle: What RBRA Has That They Don't

The structural differences that matter — not just conditions

Factor	RBRA	Others
Mission	Sole mission: bay compliance	ADV abatement is secondary to port, harbor, and marina operations
External Accountability	Binding BCDC settlement — hard Oct 2026 deadline	No equivalent binding enforcement agreement
Management & Enforcement Staff	Experienced maritime professionals in management- Dedicated harbormaster + ADV staff	Attention (staff and or funding) is usually divided between competing interest
Housing Program	~\$2,500/mo vouchers via MHA, HHS, ECS	No residential transition program
Vessel Buyback	\$150/linear ft — actively disbursing	No equivalent voluntary surrender incentive
Clear Violation Trigger	EPZ and designated anchorage with physical buoys — unambiguous	May not have spatially defined no-anchor zone, nor designated anchoring area

By the Numbers: A Decade of Transformation

From 240+ vessels to 3

240+

Vessels in 2016

\$3M

CA State Housing Grant Received
2023

\$270K

Buyback Disbursed- Grant and JPA
Member Funded

\$2.8M

EPA Eelgrass Grant

3

Vessels by March 2026

27

Individuals Housed by March 2026

44

Vessel Bought and Disposed since
2022

14.5ac

Eelgrass Restored*

**15-acre goal planted by July 2027*

5 Lessons for the Maritime Industry

What every harbor, marina, and port can take from RBRA's playbook

1

Build Internal and External Accountability — Develop realistic and obtainable plans. Voluntary programs don't hold. A binding agreement with a hard deadline converts good intentions into sustained action. Put the right people in charge of your programs

2

Create Unambiguous Enforcement Triggers — Spatially defined no-anchor zones and designated anchor areas with physical buoys turn 'difficult to enforce' into 'straightforward.'

3

Use Voluntary Exit Programs — Buyback + voluntary surrender bypass HNC §526's procedural gauntlet. Faster, cheaper, and legally cleaner than forced removal — every time.

4

Address the Human Dimension First — Enforcement without a housing strategy generates relentless opposition in coastal CA. Partner with county human services before escalating.

5

Build Inter-Agency Relationships Now — RBRA's access to DBW, NOAA, EPA, USCG, Army Corps and enforcement partners wasn't assembled during a crisis — it was built over years. Start before you need it.



Decide that it is your job.

Build the systems to do it.

Do it consistently.