



MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Over 100 years ago, the United States began to protect our most special places on land by establishing national parks, such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. Today, California is doing the same for our ocean.

What is a marine protected area?

Marine protected areas, also known as MPAs, are areas of coastal ocean set aside to protect all or parts of its habitat, species, and ecosystem components. MPAs are created in California by the California Fish and Game Commission and managed by the Department of Fish and Game. These underwater marine habitats lie within state waters three miles from shore and offer protection from fishing and other extractive uses. There are three classifications of MPAs:

Marine Reserves: Fish, wildlife and habitat are protected from all fishing and resource extraction

Marine Parks: Recreational fishing for certain species is allowed

Marine Conservation Areas: Some consumptive recreational and commercial activities are allowed

Why establish MPAs?

“What we once considered inexhaustible and resilient is, in fact, finite and fragile.”

– Pew Oceans Commission

There is growing scientific consensus that our oceans are in crisis:

- ▶ The United Nations Environment Program recently warned of worldwide collapse of fish stocks within decades
- ▶ We are losing crucial habitats
- ▶ We are adding too much pollution
- ▶ We are changing fragile ocean ecosystems... forever

As a solution to this crisis, MPAs are increasingly being used to protect biological diversity, sustain habitats and restore depleted marine populations. Currently, California is leading the way by creating a network of “underwater Yosemites” along our state’s coastline through the implementation of the Marine Life Protection Act.

What are the benefits of MPAs?

MPAs, and specifically fully protected marine reserves, protect sea life and their underwater homes in a way that regulations focused on just one or two species cannot. By restricting harvest in carefully selected areas of high-quality habitat, marine creatures within each MPA are given refuge.

MPAs provide places where fish can feed, breed and thrive, and where human impacts are minimized. As a result, marine life living within MPAs grow more diverse, abundant, and larger in size.

Populations within MPAs can also seed neighboring waters where harvest is allowed, providing benefits to fishermen. Some call this “fishing the line.” MPAs also provide larger animals, such as marine mammals and sharks, with increased availability of food.

MPAs provide insurance or a ‘savings account’ against unforeseen events such as climate change and overfishing. MPAs can ensure that marine life will be here for future generations to enjoy.

MPAs established five years ago to preserve California’s Channel Islands are working to improve biodiversity and ocean health! Recent studies have shown many targeted fish species have larger populations and were bigger inside the reserves. Fish size is an important indicator of ocean health, since larger fish produce exponentially more offspring. http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/channel_islands/specialsession.asp#overview

MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT

What process guides the creation of marine protected areas in California?

In 1999, California adopted the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) establishing the nation's first state law requiring a comprehensive, science-based network of MPAs with a goal of statewide implementation of the law by 2011. The MLPA's conservation goals focus on ecosystem protection, natural diversity and habitat protection.

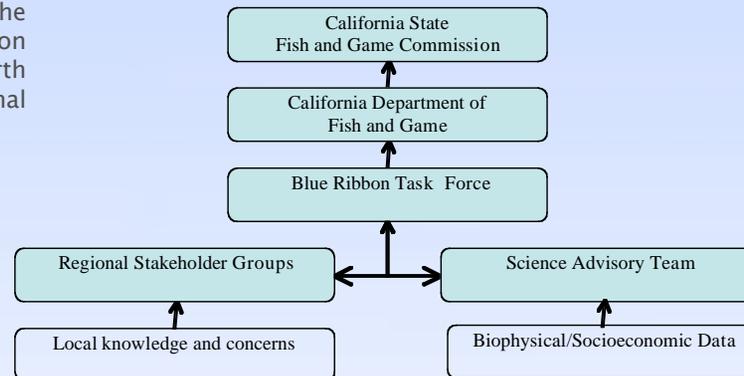
The state is taking a regional approach to implementing MPAs along the coast. The MLPA Initiative process began with the central coast, between Santa Barbara and San Mateo counties, which resulted in the establishment of 29 MPAs in September of 2007, leaving 92% of the coast open to fishing. Currently, the north central coast study region is in the final stages of the designation process, and the launch of the south coast region (Santa Barbara to the US/Mexico border) as the third phase of the Initiative was announced on December 6, 2007. The processes for the north coast and San Francisco Bay will be the final implementation.



Who decides where to establish MPAs?

Under the MLPA Initiative, California's Secretary of Resources convened a high level team of policy advisors (the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force) as well as community members and impartial scientific advisory committees with the goal of ensuring a process founded on both the best science as well as an unprecedented level of public outreach and participation.

Proposed marine protected areas are recommended by a diverse group of stake-holders including divers, fishermen, conservationists, and coastal residents. These proposals are then evaluated by a Science Advisory Team, a Blue Ribbon Task Force, and finally adopted by California's Fish and Game Commission.



How can I become involved in the MLPA Initiative?

The MLPA Initiative is committed to an inclusive, open, transparent and public process. MLPA staff actively solicits input from the public through open meetings, hearings and workshops. All meetings are web cast live and all policy documents are available for review and public comment at dfg.ca.gov/mlpa.

For more information on the MLPA and how you can be involved visit www.caloceans.org.

