

Memorandum

Date: October 1, 2013

To: Sonke Mastrup
Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission

From: Charlton H. Bonham
Director



Subject: Monitoring Results and Management Review for Central Coast Marine Protected Areas

Overview

On April 13, 2007, the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) made a landmark decision to adopt 29 new and revised central coast marine protected areas (MPAs) that were implemented into regulations on September 21, 2007. This regional network of MPAs encompasses approximately 207 square miles or 18 percent of state waters between Point Conception (Santa Barbara County) and Pigeon Point (San Mateo County). Following the first five years of implementation, initial biological and socioeconomic monitoring results do not indicate the need for regulatory changes to the central coast MPA network. However, opportunities exist for non-regulatory improvements related to MPA management, enforcement, education and outreach. As provisions in the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) require monitoring and research to facilitate adaptive management, this memo transmits the first Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) management review of the central coast MPA network to the Commission.

The central coast region is the first of four MLPA regions to launch and complete an MPA baseline monitoring program, due in large part to the coordinated efforts and collaboration of the Department, Ocean Science Trust's MPA Monitoring Enterprise, Ocean Protection Council, and California Sea Grant. To mark this milestone, a three day public symposium "*The State of the California Central Coast: Reflecting on the First Five Years of MPA Monitoring, Management, and Partnerships*" was held in Monterey from February 27 to March 1, 2013, and attended by 380 people. The purpose of the symposium was to present results from the baseline monitoring program, discuss perspectives on MLPA implementation, and provide a forum for local researchers to share results from their own research. A proceedings document produced by the MPA Monitoring Enterprise and Department summarizing the symposium outcomes is attached to this memo.

Baseline Monitoring Results

The central coast MPA baseline monitoring program provided the State with a characterization of the habitats, biological communities, and socioeconomics of the central coast region and initial changes since the new and revised MPAs were implemented in 2007. The information gathered sets an important baseline for future evaluations of the central coast MPA network and region.

The MPA baseline monitoring results and California Seafloor Mapping Program habitat data indicate that the central coast MPA network contains a variety of representative marine habitats and ecosystems with distinct communities, including species of economic value, which contribute to achieving the ecological goals of the MLPA. Recreational and commercial fishermen reported the loss of some traditional fishing grounds and the need to travel longer distances due to MPAs. However, socioeconomic evaluations revealed that fishing continues to be an integral part of the central coast local ocean economy, along with recreational dive trips, whale watching tours, and research charters. These outcomes are a testament to the collaborative central coast MPA planning process, knowledgeable and dedicated public participants, scientific and policy guidance, and resulting Commission regulatory process. Therefore, based on information gathered from the central coast MPA baseline monitoring program, the Department does not have recommendations for regulatory changes to the central coast MPA network at this time.

Management Recommendations

While regulatory changes based on monitoring results are not recommended at this time, opportunities exist for non-regulatory improvements to MPA management related to monitoring, enforcement, and education and outreach at a statewide level. Based on experience gained over the last five years implementing and managing the central coast MPAs and input from partners and stakeholders, the Department has the following management recommendations:

Long-term Monitoring

- Continue to coordinate and collaborate with key partners, such as the MPA Monitoring Enterprise, to build upon existing and new partnerships for efficient and cost-effective ongoing monitoring, including programs that integrate citizen science.
- Develop protocols to display summarized commercial and recreational fishery information for spatial analyses and visualization to aid in monitoring and understanding how MPAs affect fisheries and fishery resources.
- Continue to explore with our partners and academic institutions how MPA monitoring information can be used to inform fisheries management.

Enforcement

- Utilize available technology to make regulatory activities more efficient and effective. Technologies such as Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) are proven as an effective tool for area based management (e.g. managing groundfish conservations areas). Evaluate VMS for its utility to enhance MPA enforcement and inform fisheries management.
- Identify metrics to be collected in the field to better track MPA compliance. Enforcement activity metrics, especially enforcement statistics, are important aspects of analyzing overall MPA management success and for informing monitoring results. Technology that consistently and accurately captures these data is critical.

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- When appropriate, change or adapt regulations to simplify or clarify specific language to improve compliance.

Outreach and Education

- Develop long-term MPA signage plan: assess needs for shore-based signs, address priority needs through interagency/partner coordination; and secure commitment for future signage maintenance, replacement, and review.
- Work with community collaboratives on educational programs that support MPA goals, with special focus on broadening outreach efforts to unaware communities and audiences, including ocean users that indirectly impact living marine resources.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing outreach tools and strategies using identified metrics or benchmarks.

Adaptive management is an ongoing process informed by a variety of sources related to both MPA monitoring and implementation. As a result, regulatory adjustments have been identified for the central coast and other MLPA regions to improve compliance, management, and simplify regulations. The proposed regulatory amendments will be addressed in an upcoming MPA regulatory package for the Commission's consideration.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Dr. Craig Shuman, Manager of the Marine Region, at (805) 568-1246.

Attachment

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