

Update

Marine Protected Area Management Program e-news

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Kelp Bass (*Paralabrax clathratus*), also known as calico bass or bull bass, are found around most underwater structures shallower than 150 feet, including jetties, piers, and oil platforms. Historically they have ranged as far north as the Columbia River, Washington, but are more commonly found south of Point Conception (Santa Barbara County) to Magdalena Bay in Baja California, Mexico.

These fish have a small home range and are rarely observed in schools. However, during the spring and summer months they will gather in aggregations to spawn, with peak spawning activity in July. Kelp Bass spawning aggregations usually occur at predictable times and locations, providing recreational anglers a greater opportunity to catch this coveted sportfish (commercial take is prohibited).

Kelp Bass are considered to be powerful fighters, known to bite on either live or dead bait, and thought to be among the best eating fish around. The combination of these traits make Kelp Bass one of the most popular sportfish species caught in southern California.

But, the popularity and accessibility to target and catch these fighting fish, coupled with environmental changes, led to a decline in the abundance over the last decade. To combat this decline the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) proposed, and the California Fish and Game Commission adopted [new size and bag limits](#) in 2013.

When fishing for Kelp Bass:

1. Check the [recreational fishing regulations](#) for up-to-date bag and size limits. If you plan to fillet your fish on board a vessel, know the fillet size limit.
2. If you are older than 16 make sure you have your [fishing license](#) on you!



In addition to size and bag limits, the implementation of marine protected areas, or MPAs, may also benefit these fish. Possessing traits like highly resident, slow growing, and long-lived, means Kelp Bass are likely a species to benefit from MPAs. According to Kim Walker, CDFW Environmental Scientist, "MPAs that prohibit the take of Kelp Bass have the potential to allow for an increase in numbers and sizes of Kelp Bass within the area," and it appears that this expectation is already taking place.

Results from surveys at an [MPA at Santa Catalina Island](#), and within [MPAs at the northern Channel Islands](#) show adult Kelp Bass density, abundance, and biomass higher inside the MPAs than outside. Additionally, data collected using acoustic tags during [kelp forest monitoring](#) at Anacapa Island State Marine Reserve revealed that tagged and released Kelp Bass remained in the MPA 77 percent of the time. "In time," says Walker, "these MPAs may act as a buffer to assure the continuing health of the Kelp Bass population if unforeseen environmental fluctuations lead to a population decline".

While California's MPAs are not a quick fix to solve all fishery management concerns, they are an increasingly useful component within the management toolbox. Given California's MPAs are expected to result in various biological, ecological, and socioeconomic effects within and adjacent to their boundaries, continued monitoring of species like Kelp Bass will be invaluable to understanding the relationship between MPAs and fishery management.

Story by CDFW Environmental Scientist, Amanda Van Diggelen

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QUESTIONS?

Please send all inquiries to ASKMPA@wildlife.ca.gov



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Watch this [video](#) to learn how MPAs work to protect our resources.