

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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To: MLPA North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group
From: MLPA Initiative staff
Subject: Posing science questions to the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team
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As the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCRSG) works to develop marine protected area (MPA) proposals for the MLPA North Coast Study Region, scientific guidance may be requested from the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT). This document describes both the overarching structure of how to seek guidance from and pose science questions to the SAT as well as the process of how questions will be addressed by the SAT.

Submitting Questions to the SAT

There are several mechanisms by which science questions or requests for SAT guidance may be recorded and conveyed to the SAT:

1. MLPA Initiative staff (I-Team) will attend all MLPA Initiative meetings and record questions to the SAT. NCRSG members and members of the public, including external array proponents, should clearly articulate SAT questions during public meetings and work with staff to ensure the recorded question adequately captures the questioner's intent.
2. Science questions may be asked or guidance may be sought during public comment periods at SAT meetings. I-Team staff will record questions posed during SAT meetings and will address the questions as described below under "Responding to science questions."
3. Questions submitted to MLPAComments@resources.ca.gov are regularly distributed to the SAT and I-Team. Science questions submitted to MLPA comments will be reviewed by I-Team staff and addressed as described below.

The recommended approach for submitting science questions to the SAT is to ask science questions during public meetings. In this way, others may benefit from hearing the questions and I-Team staff is on hand to follow up with the questioner to ensure accuracy in capturing the question.

SAT Response to Science Questions

Responding to science questions is a stepwise process. Whenever possible, the I-Team will help find and clarify existing SAT guidance that addresses specific questions. In cases where guidance is not available, staff will direct science questions to the SAT, which may provide feedback in the form of information summaries, data syntheses or analyses, or general SAT guidance.

The overarching flow for addressing science questions is composed of five steps:

1. Science questions from the NCRSG and general public, including external arrays proponents, should be directed to I-Team staff as described above. I-Team staff will identify portions of the questions appropriate for the SAT and, where possible, address questions directly; staff may direct the questioner to existing relevant guidance. When staff cannot address questions,
 - a. policy questions or policy components of questions that are not appropriate for the SAT will be conveyed to the appropriate entity (i.e., MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force, California Department of Fish and Game), and
 - b. science questions or science components of questions will be conveyed to the SAT and processed as described in step 3.
2. I-Team staff will review submitted questions to ensure that questions posed are relevant to developing MPA arrays and proposals. Questions that are less relevant to MPA development, or those that require resources beyond the capacity of the SAT to address, will be assigned a lower relative priority.
3. Science questions that are relevant to MPA planning and cannot be answered by staff from existing guidance will be given to the SAT co-chairs. The co-chairs then will prioritize and forward these questions to an appropriate SAT work group, which will address the question and prepare a draft response for discussion with the full SAT. The SAT work group may seek the assistance of other knowledgeable SAT members, outside experts, and I-Team staff in developing a response.
4. Draft responses to science questions then will be presented at the following SAT meeting for discussion and potential approval; in some cases, the SAT may require additional time to address particularly complex issues. In some cases SAT work groups, with approval by the SAT co-chairs, may release draft responses to questions before the next SAT meeting to facilitate the timely development of MPA proposals.
5. Adopted SAT responses typically will be in the form of a written document. Responses will be delivered to the BRTF, NCRSG and general public, including external array proponents, during MLPA public meetings and will be posted to the MLPA website at www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa.