Committee Staff Summary for March 13, 2025 MRC

5. Staff and Agency Updates

Today's Item **Information ☒** **Action ☐**

Receive updates from staff and other agencies, including the California Ocean Protection Council and the Department.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)

Background

This is a standing agenda item for staff and agencies to provide an update on marine-related activities. Members of the public will have an opportunity to share thoughts and questions, although the level of in-meeting discussion will be at the discretion of the MRC co-chairs.

(A) ***Department***

I. *Law Enforcement Division (LED)*

LED will present an overview of 2024 marine protected area (MPA) network enforcement statistics (Exhibit 1).

II. *Marine Region*

Marine Region staff will present the Department's update on MPA Regulation change petitions.

a. Proposed timeline and process for evaluation and recommendations for MPA petitions in bin 2.

The Department's presentation today (Exhibit 5) will share a draft timeline and process for evaluating the bin 2 MPA petitions between now and November, including the integration of amended petitions and development of recommendations. There are 15 petitions, 7 of which are anticipated to be amended, based on petitioner statements or submissions. To date, staff has received four amended petitions, with a submission deadline of March 14, 2025.

In February 2025 the Commission held an initial discussion regarding potential adaptation of the MRC petition review process, which could involve redirecting some or all petition evaluations and recommendations to a committee-style meeting of the full Commission. However, today's presentation will not speculate on or propose options regarding potential Commission decisions related to process (indicated by "TBD" in the presentation timeline to denote pending future Commission guidance).

In addition, Marine Region staff will provide updates on various topics, including:

- Future management advancements for the set gillnet fishery, focusing on electronic monitoring testing with funding approved by OPC this month (Exhibit 2); and
- a presentation of the Marine Region's "2024 By the Numbers" report (exhibits 3 and 4).

(B) ***California Ocean Protection Council (OPC)***

OPC staff will provide an update on topics of interest to the Commission, including:

I. *Demonstration of the updated SeaSketch California mapping platform for reviewing MPA network petitions*

OPC funded the enhancement of the open-source SeaSketch California geospatial mapping platform; OPC staff will provide an orientation on the updated tool. Dr. Will McClintock, Senior Fellow at the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California Santa Barbara, and director of the lab that develops and implements the platform (www.seasketch.org), will demonstrate its functionality and utility for reviewing MPA petitions spatially, using several data layers. The platform is designed to facilitate public review and evaluation of current petitions proposing MPA network modifications.

(C) ***Commission Staff***

I. *Commission Coastal Fishing Communities (CFC) Policy – Implementation*

Throughout the last year, the Commission's 2024-25 Sea Grant state fellow, Devon Rossi, led efforts to further explore implementation of the CFC policy by initiating connections with new community voices and fostering collaboration with partners. Devon's final day was February 24. Prior to leaving, she gave a presentation at the seventh National Working Waterfront Network (NWWN) Conference. This national event faciliates connections and showcases initiatives that support working waterfronts, providing an excellent opportunity to introduce the policy and invite other organizations to engage with the Commission or leverage the policy in their own efforts. Her presentation showcased the policy's goals through a user-friendly, GIS-based, and web-based tool (CFC Project StoryMap) that Devon developed during her fellowship with the Commission. The StoryMap serves as an easy-to-follow, visually-engaging guide, outlining the CFC Policy's development, its three policy strategies, and implementation plans. Staff hopes fishing communities will utilize the tool to enhance their capacity to engage with decision-makers and ensure their voices are heard. Staff is working to publish the StoryMap on the Commission's updated CFC Project webpage for easy access.

Staff is also actively continuing one-on-one conversations with numerous fishing community members, organizations, and partners to explore CFC policy implementation and opportunities for collaborative support. The Commission's new 2025-2026 California Sea Grant state fellow, Caroline Newell, now assumes the lead on these efforts.

Significant Public Comments

- The petitioner for petition 2023-15MPA advocates for a standardized evaluation process for all MPA petitions using the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Master Plan for MPAs framework. They emphasize the master plan's measurable regional objectives, which

are structured under the six goals of the MLPA and they cite support from various organizations that have endorsed the master plan's adaptive management process. To demonstrate the practical application of this framework, they analyze their own petition (2023-15MPA, Northern Channel Islands) against each applicable south coast regional objective, asserting that this analysis demonstrates the petition's alignment with master plan goals (Exhibit 6).

- An eight-organization coalition urges an enhanced MPA adaptive management process, focusing on three key recommendations: (1) Clearer processes (outreach expectations, evaluation schedule, and evaluation criteria and weighting); (2) defined Commission/MRC roles (maintaining MRC venue, and set process for selecting which MPA items to send to the Commission versus MRC); and (3) integration of current MPA science into decision-making, including cited studies on environmental justice, benefits of large MPA networks, and ecosystem resilience (Exhibit 7).

Recommendation (N/A)

Exhibits

1. Department Law Enforcement Division presentation (*to be posted separately*)
2. OPC staff report for Action Item 9, *Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Advance Climate-Ready Fisheries Management*, March 3, 2025 OPC meeting
3. Department presentation: 2024 Marine Region By the Numbers
4. Department report: "2024 Marine Region By the Numbers"
5. Department presentation: MPA regulation change petitions timeline and process update
6. Letter from Blake Hermann, petitioner, petition 2023-15MPA, received February 26, 2025
7. Letter from Heal the Bay, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, Fish On, California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Azul, Wildcoast, Orange County Coastkeeper, Natural Resource Defense Council, and Environment California, received February 28, 2025

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)

Staff Recommendation
March 3, 2025

Item 9

Action Item:
Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to Advance Climate-Ready Fisheries Management

Katie Cieri, Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Program Manager

Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to $2,400,000 to the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) to administer and support two projects that will modernize data collection to advance climate-ready fisheries management:

9.a Up to $2,095,000 to conduct an electronic reporting and electronic monitoring pilot project for four fisheries

9.b Up to $305,000 to implement electronic data collection for the California Recreational Fisheries Survey

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity, Objective 3.3: Support Sustainable Marine Fisheries and Thriving Fish and Wildlife Populations; Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through a Sustainable Blue Economy, Objective 4.1: Advance Sustainable Seafood and Thriving Fishing Communities

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

By engaging with members of the fishing community and modernizing data used to manage the state's fisheries, these projects advance the following goals of OPC's Equity Plan: Goal 1 (Establish and implement more equitable and sustainable community engagement and funding); Goal 3 (Lead equitable ocean and coastal policymaking in California).

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Act of 2024, which included a $27 million Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund appropriation for ocean protection and resilience to climate change; and
3. The proposed projects are not 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378."

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

"OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to $2,400,000 to the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) to administer and support two projects that will modernize data collection to advance climate-ready fisheries management.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, Resources Legacy Fund shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management, and delivery."

Executive Summary:

California's inherently dynamic ocean and coastal ecosystems are becoming increasingly variable as the effects of anthropogenic climate change progress. This rapidly changing marine environment requires a dynamic management approach to fisheries management supported by rapid and efficient data collection. Modernizing catch reporting and data collection systems is essential to prepare California's fisheries management for the challenges of climate change.

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council authorize the disbursement of up to $2,400,000 to the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) to support two projects that will modernize data collection to advance climate-ready fisheries management: 1) conduct an electronic reporting and electronic monitoring pilot project for four fisheries, and 2) implement electronic data collection for the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS). These projects were identified in coordination with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) staff as key next steps in a phased approach towards modernizing fisheries data collection to inform climate-resilient fisheries management.

Project Summary:

Background:

Due to increased environmental variability and impacts from rapidly changing oceans, there is a critical need for proactive and data-driven decisions on shorter timelines. To adaptively manage fisheries resources in the face of climate change, fisheries and ecosystem data must be collected and analyzed as quickly and efficiently as possible. Modernizing and optimizing catch reporting and data collection systems was highlighted in the 2018 MLMA Master Plan for Fisheries as essential to future-proofing fisheries management in California against the challenges of climate change.

Historically, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has collected fishing activity records through paper landing receipts (or fish tickets) and paper logbooks. In 2018, CDFW implemented an electronic fish ticket program for landing receipts in partnership with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. The next step in implementing electronic reporting in California is the development of electronic logbooks. There are thirteen approved logbook forms in California; currently, fishermen fill out logbooks by hand each time they fish and then submit them by mail monthly to CDFW. Over the decades of logbook use, forms have become more complex, which has increased the burden on fishermen as well as the time required for data entry and review. Currently, only the Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel fleet uses voluntary digital logbook forms to submit daily catch information, but this logbook needs improvements to meet the needs of fishermen and managers.

Transitioning to electronic logbooks streamline reporting for fishermen, better align data collection with management priorities, and reduce the time needed to record, transmit, and review data. Furthermore, electronic monitoring tools such as sensors, location trackers, and onboard cameras provide additional spatial information on fishing activity as well improved tracking of catches and discards. Pairing electronic logbooks with electronic monitoring will improve data that is available to support management decisions; reliable and timely data is essential for more responsive and adaptive fishery management, particularly in the face of rapidly changing environmental conditions.

Target Fisheries:

This project will target four commercial fisheries in California to test electronic monitoring and electronic reporting: Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV), Market Squid, Set Gill Net, and Dungeness Crab. This project will also improve data collection for California's Recreational Fisheries through the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS).

- ***Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFV):*** CPFVs (i.e. charter fishing or sport fishing boats) take recreational anglers out on fishing trips for a variety of species. Currently, captains are required to submit monthly logbooks. A web-based logbook was implemented in 2015, however, improvements are necessary**.** CDFW surveys of fishermen in 2023 provided recommended electronic logbook improvements**.** An improved electronic logbook will increase fisher participation and provide finer-scale catch and effort data for management.

- ***Market Squid Fishery:*** The market squid fishery is the largest commercial fishery in California**.** Squid are particularly vulnerable to climate impacts because their reproduction and distribution are influenced by environmental factors**.** Past OPC funding supported the Squid Fishery Advisory Committee (SFAC), a group of stakeholders convened to provide recommendations to CDFW on potential changes to market squid fishery management. Implementing electronic logbooks was a key SFAC recommendation.

- ***Set Gillnet Fishery****:* The fishery targets California Halibut and White Seabass, however, has high potential for bycatch. CDFW's 2023 bycatch evaluation of the California halibut set gill net fishery recommended implementing an electronic logbook and electronic monitoring to provide critical information on fishery catch and bycatch and enable more effective management

- ***Dungeness Crab Fishery****:* Dungeness Crab gear can pose entanglement risk to whales and sea turtles. CDFW assesses entanglement risk based on best available science through the Risk Assessment Mitigation Program (RAMP). Pairing an electronic logbook with existing electronic monitoring devices will enable better management and entanglement risk mitigation.

- ***Recreational Fisheries****:* The CRFS collects fishery-dependent data on California's recreational fisheries. Electronic data collection will improve the accuracy and efficiency of monthly catch estimates and enable more responsive management.

Project Summary:

9.a. Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring Pilot

In partnership with OPC and CDFW, RLF will conduct workshops and outreach to target fleets to demonstrate different electronic reporting platforms and electronic monitoring systems prior to initiating the pilot. This initial work will ensure that the project integrates the perspectives of the

fishing community. Following this initial outreach, RLF will work closely with OPC and CDFW staff, as well as members of the fishing community, to accomplish the following objectives:

A subset of vessels in the CPFV, Market Squid, Dungeness Crab, and Set Gill Net fisheries will be outfitted with electronic reporting platforms and electronic monitoring systems, which vary in terms of user interface, capabilities, and potential for integration into the existing data management framework, and complete field testing to optimize features for the fishing fleets and CDFW.

- Up to 30 CPFV vessels will be included in testing three separate electronic logbook platforms. These platforms will represent a significant improvement on the current digital logbook and will allow fishers to report vessel position with each fishing event, thereby enabling fine-scale resolution of catch data.
- Up to 30 Market Squid vessels will be included in testing three separate electronic logbook platforms.
- Up to 20 Dungeness Crab vessels will be included in testing two separate electronic logbook platforms alongside vessel positioning and sensors to identify specific fishing activity.
    - An additional 5 vessels using experimental ropeless fishing gear will test an electronic logbook platform coupled with vessel positioning and sensors.
- Up to 10 Set Gillnet Vessels will be included in testing two electronic logbook platforms and electronic monitoring systems including vessel positioning, sensors to identify specific fishing activity, and cameras to record vessel catch and bycatch.

After field testing concludes, data and fisher feedback will be synthesized to develop a report on proof of concept and next steps to scale electronic reporting and electronic monitoring fleetwide and across other California fisheries.

9.b. CRFS Electronic Data Collection

This project will transition CRFS data entry from paper forms to electronic data collection with tablets. This will enable real-time entry of CRFS data, and result in significant data quality improvements. Alongside improvements to the CPFV electronic logbook, this project will decrease the processing time required for CDFW staff to develop monthly catch and effort estimates.

By testing electronic reporting and electronic monitoring options as well as implementing electronic data collection, these two projects will streamline reporting for fishermen, improve data quality, better align data collection with management objectives, and reduce the time needed to record, transmit, and review data. Reliable and timely data is essential for more responsive and adaptive fishery management, particularly in the face of rapidly changing environmental conditions.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

The proposed projects will test electronic reporting solutions developed with feedback from commercial fishermen and enhance data collection for recreational fishermen. By integrating input from the fishing community, the project will ensure that data collected is timely and accurate, which is crucial for sustainable fisheries management and ocean conservation. The use of electronic reporting technology enhances transparency, improves data accuracy, and enables more effective management of marine resources, fostering collaboration between diverse groups and advancing the shared goal of protecting California's marine environment.

The projects will provide critical benefits by addressing the needs of underserved communities in both the commercial and recreational fishing sectors. By developing electronic reporting solutions that are accessible and easy to use, the project reduces barriers to participation in fisheries management and enhances these communities' ability to engage in the conservation process. This project will support OPC's Equity Plan, which emphasizes addressing historical and ongoing inequities, as well as providing opportunities for communities that have been historically excluded to participate in decision-making. The project also aligns with strategies to increase access to ocean-related benefits for marginalized communities and fosters environmental justice by ensuring that all groups, especially those facing environmental or economic hardship, are included in efforts to sustain marine resources. By engaging with members of the fishing community and modernizing data used to manage the state's fisheries, these projects will address the following goals of OPC's Equity Plan: Goal 1 (Establish and implement more equitable and sustainable community engagement and funding) ; Goal 3 (Lead equitable ocean and coastal policymaking in California.

About the Grantee:

Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works at the intersection of conservation, climate change, and communities. RLF partners with donors and diverse stakeholders to support environment-oriented strategic initiatives and fiscally sponsored projects that create durable, transformative outcomes for people and nature. RLF has partnered closely with OPC for years and brings deep experience, expertise, and connections to the goal of promoting sustainable and resilient fisheries and fishing communities. To advance these shared goals, RLF has provided expertise and philanthropic resources related the revision of the Master Plan for Fisheries by conducting climate vulnerability analyses, improving understanding of socioeconomic impacts to fishing communities, enhancing CDFW technical capacity, and supporting fishery-specific stakeholder processes. This work is guided by an MOU between OPC, CDFW, and RLF that identifies opportunities for collaboration and coordinated partnership to

simultaneously advance OPC's strategic goals and those of the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA).

Project Timeline:

These projects will run for 3 years, from June 2025 to June 2028. Each fishery will undergo 12-18 months of on-water testing. The timing of outfitting and on-water testing will vary depending on fishing season for each fishery but will occur in Fall and Winter of 2025, throughout 2026, and in Fall of 2027. Electronic forms for CRFS will be developed throughout 2025 and 2027, and implemented in the field in 2027. Data will be synthesized on a rolling basis for each fishery throughout 2027 with a final report will be completed Summer of 2028.

Project Financing:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to $2,400,000 to the Resources Legacy Fund to administer and support two projects that will modernize data collection to advance climate-ready fisheries management.

Ocean Protection Council	$2,400,000
9.a. Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring Pilot Project	$2,095,000
9.b. CRFS Electronic Data Collection	$305,000
TOTAL	**$2,400,000**

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2024, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund appropriation to OPC (Fiscal Year 2024/2025) for projects that advance ocean protection and resilience to climate change. The proposed project supports the purpose of this appropriation to increase the resilience of marine wildlife and ocean and coastal ecosystems by improving data collection to inform climate-ready fisheries management and support sustainable fisheries.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

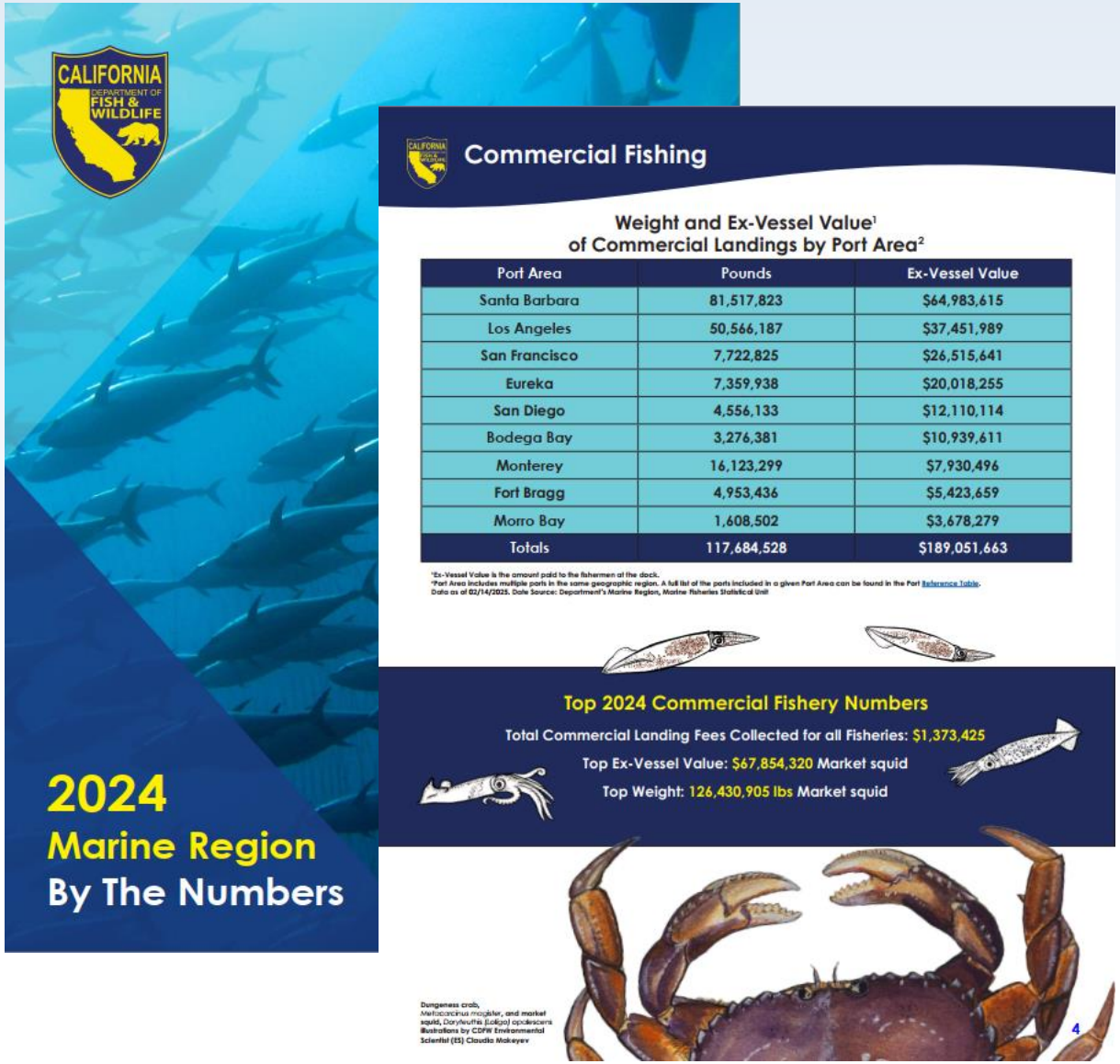
The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The proposed projects are categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Marine Region 2024 By the Numbers Report



Commercial Fishing

Weight and Ex-Vessel Value[1] of Commercial Landings by Port Area[2]

Port Area	Pounds	Ex-Vessel Value
Santa Barbara	81,517,823	$64,983,615
Los Angeles	50,566,187	$37,451,989
San Francisco	7,722,825	$26,515,641
Eureka	7,359,938	$20,018,255
San Diego	4,556,133	$12,110,114
Bodega Bay	3,276,381	$10,939,611
Monterey	16,123,299	$7,930,496
Fort Bragg	4,953,436	$5,423,659
Morro Bay	1,608,502	$3,678,279
Totals	117,684,528	$189,051,663

[1]Ex-Vessel Value is the amount paid to the fishermen at the dock.
[2]Port Area includes multiple ports in the same geographic region. A full list of the ports included in a given Port Area can be found in the Port Reference Table.
Data as of 02/14/2025. Data Source: Department's Marine Region, Marine Fisheries Statistical Unit

Top 2024 Commercial Fishery Numbers

Total Commercial Landing Fees Collected for all Fisheries: $1,373,425

Top Ex-Vessel Value: $67,854,320 Market squid

Top Weight: 126,430,905 lbs Market squid

Dungeness crab, *Metacarcinus magister*, and market squid, *Doryteuthis (Loligo) opalescens*
Illustrations by CDFW Environmental Scientist (ES) Claudia Makeyev

4

https://wildlife.ca.gov/Regions/Marine/By-the-Numbers

2024
Marine Region
By The Numbers

Table of Contents

Cover: Bluefin tuna, *Thunnus orientalis*, **CDFW photo**
this page: Cabezon, *Scorpaenichthys marmoratus*, **CDFW photo**

Message from the Regional Manager

As I reflect back on another year, I find myself embracing the highs and lows that come from managing California's marine resources in an ever-changing world. While our salmon continued to struggle and the recreational and commercial ocean salmon fisheries remained closed for a second year in a row, I remain optimistic.

In early 2024, Governor Newsom launched California's Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future and for the first time in a generation, we saw salmon return to historic habitat in the upper Klamath River Basin – just months after completion of the historic dam removal. Although large-scale recovery will take time, the Salmon Strategy offers hope for restoring California's salmon populations and iconic fisheries.

Despite the heavy toll of a closed salmon season for the second year, we had a number of high points throughout 2024. The groundfish boat-based season kicked off in April and remained open through the end of the year throughout the entire state. Anglers in southern California had the opportunity to target rockfish in the previously closed waters of the Cowcod Conservation Areas for the first time in more than 20 years. These waters produced some spectacular catches while still protecting the sensitive and abundant coral and sponge populations within eight smaller Groundfish Exclusion Areas.

We celebrated the 75th anniversary of the California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations. Known as CalCOFI, this program has collected marine samples and data off California's coast longer than any other marine ecosystem field research initiative in the world, marking three quarters of a century dedicated to understanding our ocean.

In partnership with the California Fish and Game Commission and Ocean Protection Council, we embarked on a process to receive and evaluate petitions aimed at improving California's network of Marine Protected Areas. To ensure transparency and public engagement, we created an MPA Story Map which provides detailed information about the petitions and the review process.

Finally, a true highlight for me was a surprise gift of marine-themed artwork from the students of Herron House Preschool Center in Selma, CA. This simple, yet heartfelt gesture, was a poignant reminder of how deeply connected all Californians are to the ocean and how future generations depend on us.

Looking ahead, I see both challenges and opportunities. Regardless of the obstacles, I am confident that CDFW staff, California Tribes, stakeholders, policymakers, and partners will come together, driven by our shared love for the ocean, to ensure the sustainable management of California's ocean resources and a healthy future.

Dr. Craig Shuman

2024 Marine Region

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Region 7 is known as the Marine Region. It encompasses approximately **5,767** square statute miles of state waters, including San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay to the Carquinez Bridge.

For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Marine Region budget was **$30,380,049**.

152 permanent staff as of December 31, 2024.

Temporary Positions:
7 Permanent Intermittent Fish and Wildlife Technicians
75 Fish & Wildlife Scientific Aids

Kelpfish, *Heterostichus rostratus*, **CDFW photo**

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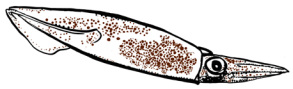

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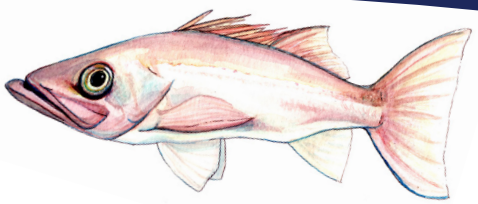
Commercial Fishing



Vessel Registration and Fishing License Revenue

Type	Numbers Sold	Revenue
Resident Vessel	2,587	$1,228,825
Non-Resident Vessel	270	$376,785
Total Vessels	2,857	$1,605,610
Resident License	4,829	$898,387
Non-Resident License	537	$289,711
Total Licenses	5,366	$1,188,098

Data as of 02/14/2025. Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV permit) is a subset of the Resident and Non-Resident Vessel total. There were 575 Registered Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels with a total value of $273,125. Data Source: Department's License and Revenue Branch. *Note that landings and value reported over the calendar year (January 1 – December 31) This may differ from seasonal landings for specific fisheries reported elsewhere.

Top Fisheries Landed by Weight

Fishery	Pounds	Ex-Vessel Value
Market Squid	126,430,905	$67,854,320
Dungeness Crab	14,173,812	$49,744,975
Northern Anchovy	9,718,850	$627,641
Pacific Sardine	3,258,365	$667,149
Pacific Mackerel	3,056,272	$800,895
Sablefish	2,879,288	$4,734,080
Chilipepper Rockfish	2,216,886	$1,420,034
Red Sea Urchin	2,130,789	$7,476,765
Bocaccio Rockfish	1,538,767	$935,183
Petrale Sole	1,492,852	$1,788,001
Totals	166,896,789	$136,049,046

Data as of 02/14/2025. *Note that landings and value are reported for the calendar year (January 1 – December 31). This may differ from seasonal landings for specific fisheries reported elsewhere. Data source: Department's Marine Region, Marine Fisheries Statistical Unit.

Bocaccio, *Sebastes paucispinus,* **illustration by CDFW ES C. Makeyev**

Commercial Fishing

Top Fisheries by Ex-Vessel Value

Fishery	Pounds	Ex-Vessel Value
Market Squid	126,430,905	$67,854,320
Dungeness Crab	14,173,811	$49,744,974
California Spiny Lobster	1,080,004	$20,893,435
Red Sea Urchin	2,130,789	$7,476,765
California Halibut	1,014,939	$5,756,950
Sablefish	2,879,288	$4,734,080
Spot Prawn	176,968	$3,942,641
Yellow Rock Crab	765,516	$1,801,066
Petrale Sole	1,492,852	$1,788,001
Bluefin Tuna	288,453	$1,712,489
Totals	150,433,530	$165,704,725

Data as of 02/14/2025. *Note that landings and value reported over the calendar year (January 1 – December 31) This may differ from seasonal landings for specific fisheries reported elsewhere. Data source: Department's Marine Region, Marine Fisheries Statistical Unit

Top Groundfish Landings

Species	Pounds	Ex-Vessel Value
Nearshore[1]	393,809	$2,472,275
Shelf and slope rockfish	4,804,414	$4,210,159
Dover sole, thornyheads, sablefish (black cod)	4,193,491	$6,919,095
Remaining flatfish[2]	1,712,487	$1,891,300
Other[3]	421,814	$442,516
Totals	11,526,014	$15,935,345

[1] Includes nearshore rockfish, California scorpionfish, cabezon, greenlings and California sheephead.
[2] Includes arrowtooth flounder (turbot), butter sole, curlfin sole, English sole, Pacific sanddab, petrale sole, rex sole, sand sole and starry flounder.
[3] Includes all remaining species in the federal groundfish Fishery Management Plan.
Data Source: Department's Marine Landings Database System and includes landings reported through 02/14/2025. *Note that landings and value reported over the calendar year (January 1 – December 31) This may differ from seasonal landings for specific fisheries reported elsewhere

California spot prawn, *Pandalus platyceros*, and sablefish, *Anoplopoma fimbria* illustration by CDFW ES C. Makeyev

Recreational Fishing

California Recreational Fisheries Survey Sampling

Data Collected from: 76,952 angler trips

Estimated Recreational Fishing Trips in Marine Waters: 2.1 million

Estimated Total Fish Caught: 4.2 million

Measurements Collected from: 78,450 fish

Data Source: Department's Marine Region, California Recreational Fisheries Survey. Data as of 02/11/2025.

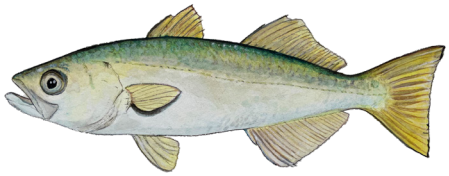
Top Types of Fish Targeted by Recreational Anglers Based on Pounds of Fish Caught[1]

Rank	Type of Fish	Estimated Pounds of Fish Caught[1]
1	**Tunas** (bluefin, yellowfin, & albacore)	5,138,000
2	**Rockfish, greenlings, and cabezon**	2,144,000
3	**Flatfish** (California halibut, Pacific sanddab, Pacific halibut, soles, & starry flounder)	747,000
4	**Lingcod**	459,000
5	**California scorpionfish**	332,000
6	**Sea Bass** (barred sandbass, kelp bass, & spotted sand bass)	312,000
7	**Striped bass**	227,000
8	**Yellowtail**	164,000
9	**Ocean whitefish**	136,000
10	**Croakers** (White seabass, spotfin, white, & yellowfin croakers)	82,000

[1]Fish Caught = fish kept and fish released dead, estimates are preliminary and may differ from what is used for fisheries management.
Data source: CRFS estimates and data were extracted from RecFIN database at www.recfin.org and supplemented by CDFW Fisheries Analytics Project and Ocean Salmon Project. Highly Migratory catch from Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels were summed from the Marine Log System. Data as of 02/11/2025.

Top: Pompano, *Peprilus simillimus*. **Bottom: Sheep crab,** *Loxorhynchus grandis*.
Illustrations by CDFW ES C. Makeyev

Recreational Fishing



Total Recreational Licenses Sold and Fees Collected

License Type	Numbers Sold	Value
All Recreational Fishing Licenses[1]	1,550,979	$71,326,100
Ocean Enhancement Validation[2]	251,703	$1,636,070
Spiny Lobster Report Card	33,593	$377,921
Recreational Crab Trap Validation Stamps	36,663	$100,823

[1]Note that recreational fishing licenses are valid for ocean and inland fishing in California. [2]Ocean Enhancement Validation stamps are required for ocean fishing south of Point Conception, Santa Barbara County. Data Source: Department's License and Revenue Branch, as of 2/11/2025. https://wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Statistics

Top Types of Fish Targeted by Recreational Anglers Based on Fishing Trips

Rank	Trip-Type and Top Species Targeted[1]	Estimated Number of Angler Trips
1	**Bottomfish:** Rockfish, lingcod, California scorpionfish and ocean whitefish	603,000
2	**Highly Migratory:** Bluefin tuna, yellowfin tuna, albacore and dolphinfish (dorado)	417,000
3	**Inshore:** California halibut, barred surfperch, spotfin croaker, and redtail surfperch	342,000
4	**Coastal Migratory:** Yellowtail, chub (Pacific) mackerel, Pacific barracuda and Pacific bonito	91,000
5	**Other Anadromous:** Striped bass, white sturgeon	69,000

[1]For each trip target: the top species are listed based on the estimated total catch in pounds. Data source: CRFS estimates and data were extracted from RecFIN database at www.recfin.org and supplemented by CDFW Fisheries Analytics Project and Ocean Salmon Project. Highly Migratory effort and catch from Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels were summed from the Marine Log System. Data as of 02/11/2025.

Top: Queenfish, *Seriphus politus*. **bottom: Bottom: Pacific hake**, *Merluccius productus*, **illustrations by CDFW ES C. Makeyev**

Marine Region Highlights

Permitting

- A new Marine Permitting Project was established to improve efficiency and consistency of developing and implementing Experimental Fishing and Scientific Collecting Permits.

State Experimental Fishing Permits (EFPs)

- Total active EFPs: 5
- Total EFP Amendments: 7

Marine Scientific Collecting Permits (SCPs)

- Total SCPs Issued: 181; Of those issued, for work within MPAs: 58

Other Permits Issued

- Aquaculture Registrations: 41
- Letters of Authorization (LOA): 10
- Aquaria Permits: 137
- Restricted species permits: 11
- Incidental Take Permits issued: 2
- Sea Otter Game Refuge Flyover Request LOAs issued: 10

Artificial Reefs

- Secured $550,000 in funding from Ocean Protection Council to begin development of the California Artificial Reef Program (CARP) Plan, a programmatic guidance document that will direct the implementation of the CARP providing science-based direction on materials, design, siting function and performance standards. https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Artificial-Reefs

California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

- ESA 2081(a) MOUs to permit take of CESA-listed marine species for scientific, educational or management purposes: 40 issued
- CESA 2081(a) MOU Amendments: 7 issued

Regulatory Activity

- State regulatory packages completed: 11
- Reports submitted in support of federal regulatory activities: 56

Dive Program

Total Dives: 816 Total Dive Hours: 511

Marine Region Vessels

The State Managed Finfish and Nearshore Ecosystem Program recently acquired a new research vessel (R/V), the R/V Nereocystis ("Nereo" for short). The R/V Nereo is a 14-foot Achilles inflatable vessel, based at the Marine Region's Santa Rosa Field Office. The vessel will support field needs, primarily with efforts in Northern California to conduct research diving operations on collaborative kelp restoration projects and monitor commercial and recreational kelp harvest. Additionally, R/V Nereo will be deployed to inspect state water bottom aquaculture leases and other high priority bay and estuary resource needs, such as eelgrass and invasive species surveys.

The Marine Enforcement District in central California took delivery of Patrol Boat (P/B) Barracuda, a 74 x 27 ft aluminum catamaran patrol vessel. The vessel is equipped to handle a wide range of near coastal and offshore missions and will support partner agencies. An onboard air compressor and 500+ mile range will help support resource management programs. Missions will include multi-day patrols, commercial gear inspection and recovery, fishery enforcement, and marine protected area patrols. The new vessel replaces its 21-year old predecessor, P/B Steelhead. P/B Barracuda is home ported in Half Moon Bay.

Total days at sea for all Marine Region vessels: 189

- Goby 12 ft
- Sanddab 12 ft
- Chilipepper 14 ft
- Remora 18 ft
- Ronquil 19 ft
- Roncador 19 ft
- Pinto 19 ft
- Surf Scoter 19 ft
- Megathura 21 ft
- Smoothhound 25 ft
- Irish Lord 26 ft
- Mystinus 29 ft
- Garibaldi 45 ft

P/B Barracuda on patrol. Photo courtesy of All American Marine.

Data Collection

- Staff read 2,449 coded wire tags and assigned ages to salmon collected from 6 surveys of inland spawning escapement across the Central Valley.
- Groundfish and Pacific halibut otoliths collected for use in future stock assessments: 1,281
- Sardine, anchovy, Pacific mackerel, and jack mackerel samples collected and processed: 3,779
- Sardin otolith pairs examined for age determination: 175
- Market squid sampled collected and processed for biological data/to populate the egg escapement assessment: 4,735 across 158 landings sampled.
- Juvenile white abalone outplanted: 2,637
- Pismo clam surveys counted 1,437 clammers and 986 measured.
- Barred sand bass dive survey transects: 202
- Barred sand bass counted: 753
- White seabass measured and scanned for coded-wire tags: 2,750
- California halibut trawl surveys for spring and fall covered 9 sites, 79 tows, and 842 halibut measured.
- California halibut in Central California, 44 samples representing 1,082 fish
- California halibut in Southern California, 28 samples representing 223 fish

Marine Region Information Sharing

General Outreach

- Marine Region Related CDFW Press Releases: 22
- Social Media Posts: 52
- Responses to Public Inquiries Sent via email: 1,600+
- Public Events Attended: 40
- New Species-at-a-Glance Summaries: 6

Marine Management News Blog

- Visits (Shares are not included): 80,000+
- Blog post views: 114,000+

Marine Protected Area Project

- Published 1 interactive MPA Petitions StoryMap webpage
- MPA Collaborative Meeting Presentations: 23
- Distributed MPA outreach resources: 2,900+

CDFW outreach at the Bart Hall Show. CDFW photo.

Data Sharing

- Confidential Data Sharing Agreements: 13
- Non-Confidential Data Sharing Requests: 12

Publications

- Perkins, N. R., Lauermann, A., Prall, M., Hosack, G. R., & Foster, S. D. (2024). Diving deep into the network: Quantifying protection effects across California's marine protected area network using a remotely operated vehicle. Conservation Science and Practice, 6(9), e13190.
- Haggerty, M. B., and C. Valle. 2024. Incidental take of Giant Sea Bass in the gill net fishery. California Fish and Wildlife Journal
- The Pacific Herring Enhanced Species Report (02/01/24).
- California Marine Species Information available at: https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/

Garibaldi, Hypsypops rubicundus. Photo by JKD.

Marine Protected Area Petition Evaluation Status and Next Steps

13 March 2025

Presented to:

Marine Resources Committee

California Fish and Game Commission

Presented by:

Claire Waggoner

Marine Region Habitat

Conservation Program Manager

Recap: Decadal Management Review and Petition Timeline

2023

- Release of DMR
- Public meetings to discuss DMR results and recommendations

2023–2024

- MPA Petitions submitted to CFGC and referred to CDFW for evaluation

2024

- Petition evaluation framework developed
- Bin 1 petition evaluation completed
- StoryMap released

2025

- Bin 2 petition amendments
- Bin 2 evaluation framework
- CDFW develop recommendations

Common acronyms:
CFGC=California Fish and Game Commission
CDFW=California Department of Fish and Wildlife
DMR=Decadal Management Review
MRC=Marine Resources Committee

CALIFORNIA MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Petition Evaluation Framework: Status

Proposed Bin 2 Petition Milestones and Timeline

March MRC	Discuss CDFW's proposed timeline
April CFGC	Receive amended petitions (received by deadline)
July MRC	Discuss evaluation framework and proposed petition groupings
August CFGC	Approve petition groupings and framework
November MRC	Initial discussion of CDFW recommendations
December CFGC	TBD

- Refine draft Bin 2 evaluation framework
- Group Bin 2 petitions
- Process overview

- Evaluate petitions in context of MPA Network and 2016 Master Plan using refined evaluation framework

MPA Petition Updates: StoryMap

Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Petition Process

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Click through the collection to:

→See an **overview** of the petition process, petition evaluation framework, and anticipated timeline

→Dive into an **interactive map** to visualize proposed changes

→Explore **petitions sorted** by numerical order, change category, or county, and click the links to learn more about each petition. Any petition proposing a change that can be visualized on a map (e.g., boundary or designation change) will have an image with a slider to swipe between the existing network and the proposed change. Any petition proposing a non-spatial change (e.g., take allowance or regulatory language change) will have a static image showing the location of the affected MPA(s).

- **Current status:**
  - CDFW is in Phase 2 of its 3-phased petition evaluation framework and splitting each petition into individual action items
  - At the December Commission meeting, CDFW provided its annual report on MPA Management Program accomplishments for 2024; next steps for Bin 2 petition evaluation were discussed, including setting a timeline for accepting amendments to Bin 2 petitions; and, as recommended by the MRC, the Commission adopted a slightly modified version of CDFW's draft recommendations for Bin 1 petitions

- **Up next:**
  - For Bin 2 petitioners who submitted a notice to amend their petition, the full amendment package is due March 14, 2025

Stay up to date!

Next Steps: Implement DMR Recommendations

Near-Term (ongoing – 2 years)

- Rec 1: Improve state agencies tribal engagement
- Rec 4: Apply Review knowledge to Network/Management changes
- Rec 7: Expand outreach and education materials
- Rec 9: Continue OPC coordination
- Rec 10: Improve coordination across Management Program pillars
- Rec 11: Update Action Plan
- Rec 16: More targeted outreach to specific audiences
- Rec 17: Improve SCP process
- Rec 18: Use policy to review MPA restoration/mitigation efforts
- Rec 20: Increase enforcement capacity
- Rec 21: Enhance citation record keeping and management
- Rec 25: Implement MPA climate change research
- Rec 27: Improve understanding of MPA effects on fisheries

Mid-Term (2 – 5 years)

- Rec 2: Create pathway to tribal MPA management
- Rec 3: Build tribal capacity to participate in MPA management
- Rec 6: Include and fund more diverse researchers and stakeholders
- Rec 8: Evaluate MPA accessibility
- Rec 12: Improve understanding of human dimensions
- Rec 13: Explore innovative technologies
- Rec 14: Develop MPA community science strategy
- Rec 15: Evaluate Outreach needs and resource effectiveness
- Rec 22: Increase knowledge on MPA judicial outcomes
- Rec 23: Examine MPA Network design attribute more effectively
- Rec 26: Consider climate change in human dimensions monitoring
- Rec 28: Integrate influencing factors into MPA performance evaluations

Long-Term (5- 10 years)

- Rec 5: Establish targets to meet MLPA goals
- Rec 19: Create MPA Enforcement Plan
- Rec 24: Better incorporate marine cultural heritage into MPA Network

Thank You

Questions?

fgc@fgc.ca.gov

mpamanagementreview@wildlife.ca.gov

CDFW

From: Blake Hermann [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2025 8:18 AM
To: FGC <FGC@fgc.ca.gov>; Ashcraft, Susan[redacted]
Shuman, Craig[redacted]
Subject: Comment on Bin 2 MPA Petition evaluation process

Hello all,

See attached comment letter requesting and supporting previous comments that petition be evaluated under the MPA Master Plan(s), most notably the guiding regional objectives under the MLPA goals from the Master Plans.
Letter additionally breaks down the Master Plan's objectives in the scope of Petition2023-15MPA specifically, highlighting why petition should be considered. This is all referencing the most recent revised version of the petition submitted in January.

Thank you,

Blake Hermann

Petitioner - Petition2023-15MPA

Guiding the Petition process through the MPA Master Plan's Regional Objectives under the MLPA Goals, and Petition2023-15MPA's support under said Goals and Objectives

To the FGC and MRC,

The adaptive management process of the MPA network through the petition process has been an all encompassing process stretching nearly two years and has consisted of many meetings with stakeholders from a multitude of backgrounds across the State.

Currently, several stakeholders have differing views on and are determining under what venues to discuss bin 2 petitions. Personally, I do not mind MRC or full commission discussions, but do see benefits to possibly holding discussions at both. This way we could benefit from the more casual open floor of the MRC and still keep all commissioners involved and informed on these petitions to gain the best final actions on these petitions from the full commission.

That being said, one commonality throughout this process from all groups has been the calling for the analysis process to be explicitly guided by the existing MPA Master Plan's (MMP) adaptive management process. This calling has come from all sides, from recreational and commercial fishing organizations such as AllWaters, CFSB, CCA, and the American Sportfishing Anglers (ASA), to environmental NGOs like Azul, Environment California, Environmental Defence Center, the NRDC, and WILDCOAST. The ladder eNGOs were among 17 groups who jointly signed and sent a letter to the FGC explicitly stating to guide the process through the MMP and its objectives in January.

The MMPs are a framework that guides the adaptive management process of the MPAs as that was part of their original intention. The process guided by the MMP lays out a clear analysis path through lists of "objectives" that fall under the six broader goals of the MLPA. These objectives under the six MLPA goals are what the MMP uses to determine if an MLPA goal is met, as the objectives are, "more specific and measurable than the broader MLPA goals," according to the MMP. In order to best determine if an MLPA goal is met, we look at these objectives stated under the regional MMP and determine if the objective is satisfied using the best available science/data. This process is laid out in Chapter 4.5 of the 2016 MMP, and the measurable objectives under each MLPA goal can be found in the regional appendices (C-F) in the suitably named "Regional Goals and Objectives" sections of the MMP.

I would not only like to echo all comments from both sides of the aisle to guide the process through the MMP(s) and their objectives, but to also bring up that Petition2023-15MPA is one of, if not, the only petition with explicitly stated support in the MMP objectives (see Goal 2 Objective 4 (2.4) below). This stated support of Petition2023-15MPA is laid out by not only the more-modern 2016 MMP, but even the original MMP from 2008, showing a historic, scientifically based rationale for Petition2023-15MPA, that came after the designation of the Northern Channel Islands Network. This shows our obligation to update this pre-MMP island network to modern standards we see in our coastal network that better follows these underlining MMP objectives.

The remaining sections of this document will go through all of the six goals of the MLPA (bold), the guiding MMP regional objectives under each MLPA goal (numbers), and provide a breakdown response of the specific objective through the scope of Petition2023-15MPA (letters). For context, Petition2023-15MPA is requesting 3 SMRs at the Northern Channel Islands be modified to SMCAs to allow for the limited take of Highly Migratory Species (HMS) or pelagic finfish, listing a variety of different allowable gear options, 6 in total not including additional possible nearshore/offshore MPA configurations. The core rationale of the petition is, we know the benefits of MPAs on HMS/pelagic species are very low compared to the high burden certain local MPA networks, in this case the Channel Islands, place on HMS/pelagic fisheries, and that we see pelagic allowances everywhere else but not in the older Channel Islands network where pelagic allowed areas should arguably be the most prevalent.

MLPA Goal 1. To protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function, and integrity of marine ecosystems.

1. Protect and maintain species diversity and abundance consistent with natural fluctuations, including areas of high native species diversity and representative habitats.
    a. The three MPAs in the petition and their locations are not intrinsically unique to HMS/pelagic finfish due to their highly migratory nature. The migratory nature of these species and the vast area of water they cover shows clear evidence that any take of HMS or pelagic finfish within these MPAs will not significantly affect HMS or pelagic finfish abundance any more than what existing fishery pressure already exerts on these species outside of the MPAs. Additionally, pelagic and HMS fisheries are all offshore, open-water fisheries, and are non-bottom contact. This means any effect on representative habitats containing a diverse spread of species on bottom reefs or nearshore kelp forests will be minimal due to

fishing simply not occurring there, still protecting those species that benefit from MPAs the most.
We already see this in use outside of the Channel Islands Network in the more-modern coastal network that came under the state driven MLPA implementation process. Nearly 40% of the coastal network allows for some form of limited, mostly pelagic, take and still protects those species and habitats that benefit from the protection, the pre-MMP/MLPA Channel Islands only has 3.5%.

2. Protect areas with diverse habitat types in close proximity to each other.
    a. As the petition prefers only HMS take being allowed, the alternative being a pelagic finfish allowance, the only habitat type affected by this change will be open water. Pelagics and HMS are open water targeted species, one rarely sees billfish or tunas targeted even remotely nearshore let alone in a kelp forest or shallow reef. The unique habitats inside the three MPAs such as kelp forests or rocky reefs will see little to no change in relative level of protection. Even the bottom areas of the three MPAs, which consists of mostly empty mud flats thousands of feet deep, will see no meaningful change in its protection as nearly all HMS or pelagic effort is done at or near the surface or in the mid-water, rarely deeper than 100ft. If needed, the petition also includes options further restricting bottom contact gears outright, but again HMS and pelagic effort mostly avoids the bottom in general.

3. Protect natural size and age structure and genetic diversity of populations in representative habitats.
    a. The species that live inside these MPAs year-round that gain the most from them are nearshore species living in the shallow-nearshore sections of the MPAs, or are groundfish frequenting the bottom habitat nearshore and offshore on rocky reefs. This fact is stated in the 2008 MMP appendix G which describes what species benefit the most from MPAs and why. As these non-pelagic, local species are predominantly found in these nearshore habitats, and not in open water where HMS and pelagics are found, all of these local, non-pelagic species can expect their populations and genetic diversities to be unaffected by this change. HMS or pelagic species would of course experience some form of take; however, as previously mentioned, levels of take within these areas would not be any different from the surrounding open area and would not be in levels affecting their population structures within the MPA.

4. Protect biodiversity, natural trophic structure, and food webs in representative habitats.
    a. The amount of HMS or pelagic finfish in these areas is not expected to be significantly higher than the surrounding open area due to their migratory nature. Because of this, the overall trophic structure and food webs of the area will not be significantly affected as any interactions with these HMS or pelagic species will still be present as they move in and out of the area on the currents. The existing protections on local, non-pelagics will remain, leaving the remaining levels of the web unchanged.
    While some argue pelagic fisheries can just work around the closures, around the Channel Islands because of the higher closure rates, the federal offshore expansions, naval closures, and weather restrictions around the islands make pelagic fisheries are significantly more constricted. Allowing limited pelagic access inside these MPAs will benefit the fisheries not because they contain more pelagic or HMS, but because the added total available area is locally significant.

5. Promote recovery of natural communities from disturbances, both natural and human induced, including water quality.
    a. HMS and pelagic finfish are well managed groups of fish that are in no need of recovery. In fact, the HMS fishery is one state and federal managers are actively trying to grow due to domestic lack of participation. The water quality protections within the three Channel Islands MPAs in the petition will of course still remain even if the petition is accepted in-part or fully. Additionally the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary water quality regulations in the entire area in and out of the MPAs will remain in effect.

MLPA Goal 2. To help sustain, conserve, and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.

1. Help protect or rebuild populations of rare, threatened, endangered, depressed, depleted, or overfished species, and the habitats and ecosystem functions upon which they rely.
    a. As mentioned under Gaol 1.5a, none of the HMS or pelagic finfish species that would be targeted in these three MPAs are rare, threatened, endangered, depressed, depleted, or overfished. The open water habitats they live inside will still have existing protections on the habitat. Currently, an overwhelming percentage of HMS consumed in this State are longline imports versus our cleaner hook-and-line fleets. Local swordfish and tuna

fishermen locally pick from the same stocks international longline fleets do, taking only a fraction of the stock and offering a superior grade of seafood both commercially and recreationally for personal consumption. Allowing access to these areas offers a way to meaningfully impact local fleets around the Channel Islands by providing them more water to cover while also not significantly impacting the HMS or pelagic stocks which are currently significantly more affected by international fisheries.

2. Sustain or increase reproduction by species likely to benefit from MPAs, with emphasis on those species identified as more likely to benefit from MPAs, and promote retention of large, mature individuals.
    a. Appendix G of the 2008 MMP breaks down, on a species level, fish that benefit from MPAs the most and fish that benefit the least. The MMP states that, species benefiting from MPAs the most are local, non-pelagic species:

    "MPAs are likely to have their greatest direct benefits on residential species. In general, MPAs offer direct protection to less mobile or sedentary species that locally aggregate in specific habitats (e.g., many of the rockfish species)." -Appendix G of the 2008 MMP

    These local, non-pelagic species would still be protected even if this petition was accepted, still allowing for these species to benefit the most from the MPAs, and retain populations of large, mature individuals. The 2008 MMP additionally states that HMS and pelagic finfish are species that receive less if any benefits from MPAs due to sheer amount of water they cover:

    "Species with a strong tendency to move will not benefit significantly from the establishment of MPAs [...] Direct benefits of MPAs are expected to be much reduced for highly migratory species (e.g., swordfish, tunas, some sharks) that likely spend relatively little time inside local coastal MPAs. Protection of these mobile species and their contributions to local marine ecosystems may best be addressed by larger-scale regulatory measures." -Appendix G of the 2008 MMP

    With the above guiding information, there is no scientifically supporting rationale to leave the three MPAs in Petition2023-15MPA completely closed to pelagics or HMS. Rather, due to the area traveled by HMS or pelagic finfish, best protective practices are seasonal restrictions, and

size/length requirements, something we already use Stateside with pelagic finfish and federally with HMS. The primary driver this petition only applies to three MPAs and not others was, unlike other no-take areas, pelagic or HMS can more than reasonably be targeted whilst meeting our protection goals in these three MPAs specifically (see Goal 2.4a below). For example, there is no reason to request pelagic or HMS access in MPAs simply too far offshore due to lack of total effort or areas too nearshore that would reasonably never offer significant amounts of pelagic or HMS opportunities because they are too shallow.

3. Sustain or increase reproduction by species likely to benefit from MPAs with emphasis on those species identified as more likely to benefit from MPAs through protection of breeding, spawning, foraging, rearing or nursery areas or other areas where species congregate.
    a. As mentioned above in Goal 2.2a those species "likely to benefit from MPAs," non-pelagics/groundfish, will continue to be protected including their breeding, spawning, foraging, rearing and nursery areas, including other areas where species congregate, kelp forests/rocky reefs. These respective habitats will also see little to no effect as pelagic or HMS fishing efforts rarely overlap nearshore areas, shallow, or deep water reefs. These protections still being in effect will allow individuals to grow and mature, increasing local reproduction of the species.

4. Protect selected species and the habitats on which they depend, while allowing some commercial and/or recreational harvest of migratory, highly mobile, or other species; and other activities.
    a. This MMP objective displays the central ideas of Petition2023-15MPA, clearly stating areas like those requested in the petition be provided. The Channel Islands MPAs (which contain the three MPAs in the petition) are the oldest in the modern network and expand the furthest offshore, yet they provide the least amount of pelagic allowance in the State. The original intentions for these MPAs was protecting local, non-pelagic species, namely groundfish. The Footprint Reserve is a glowing example of this, disconnected from any mainland or island and over a deepwater reef that once was a groundfish fishing area. The MPA went in to specifically rebuild overfished groundfish populations, yet it provides no pelagic allowance. In fact, the Footprint is the <u>only</u> MPA in the State that is disconnected from land that does not have any type of limited pelagic allowance.

Broadly speaking, the Channel Islands network exceeds the State Network in terms of percent area in MPAs, 21% of island waters are protected compared to the State as a whole which has 16% of its waters protected. The Channel Islands are also the only network of MPAs in the State that extend 6 nautical miles offshore, twice the normal 3 nm distance offshore we see. This offshore expansion interferes more with HMS/pelagic fisheries compared to the other State MPAs that are more nearshore.

One would assume that with the higher percent of protection locally and twice the offshore interference that reasonable amounts of pelagic or HMS access would be given, yet the Channel Islands network offers the least pelagic access in the entire MPA network. Where 40% of the State MPAs have some form of pelagic allowance the Channel Islands network only provides 3.5%. While these protections were justifiable over 20 years ago when MPAs were newer, the coastal network didn't exist, the MMPs didn't exist, and less was known about MPAs and pelagic species; the two more-modern MMPs and this objective specifically are glowing examples of why we must adaptively manage the network and provide reasonable amounts of pelagic access where it is realistic as touched on above in Goal 2.2a.

MLPA Goal 3. To improve recreational, educational, and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbances, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.

1. Sustain or enhance cultural, recreational, and educational experiences and uses (for example, by improving catch rates, maintaining high scenic value, lowering congestion, increasing size or abundance of species, and protecting submerged sites).
    a. The allowance of this petition would certainly provide decongestion of HMS or pelagic fishing areas, especially around Santa Cruz Island during Naval Activity days when most areas beyond 3nm of the island are closed and pelagic opportunity is extremely limited. Catch rates would increase relatively proportional to the included area as the MPAs do not hold significantly more or less HMS or pelagic finfish than the already open waters do. Scenic value of land based and submerged sites would not change, as HMS or pelagic fishing activity has little to no bottom contact interference and is done offshore away from the more biodiverse nearshore areas. Lastly, as mentioned, the size and abundance of local species will not change as they will still be protected, even the size and

abundance of HMS or pelagics should not vary beyond normal fluctuations due to the species covering so much area.

2. Provide opportunities for scientifically valid studies, including studies on MPA effectiveness and other research that benefits from areas with minimal or restricted human disturbance.
    a. Within the three MPAs the petition looks at there are currently no scientific studies occurring in the midwater where limited take will be present. Occasional bottom surveys of deep water reefs occur inside and outside of these MPAs and the broader Channel Islands; however, a pelagic allowance will not affect these ROV trips or the adundence/diversities of species researchers observe on said trips (we already interact with them when they are outside of the MPAs).

3. Provide opportunities for collaborative scientific monitoring and research projects that evaluate MPAs that promote adaptive management and link with fisheries management, seabird and mammals information needs, classroom science curricula, cooperative fisheries research and volunteer efforts, and identifies participants.
    a. If granted, this petition does open some doors for scientific monitoring of an area previously closed to everything being opened to HMS or pelagic finfish. This information could be used as part of future adaptive management cycles of the network. While ties between MPAs and fishery management still do exist, these ties have decreased in the pelagic arena for smaller MPAs and nearshore MPA networks, which is what we currently have. The key reason for this is in order for an MPA to have impact on HMS it would have to cover significant amounts of offshore ocean over multiple jurisdictions and international waters, not the nearshore waters most of our network covers. Enforcement alone of an area of that size is simply unreasonable which is why HMS fisheries are managed under size, quantity, and quota limits, not MPAs.

MLPA Goal 4. To protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in South Coast California waters, for their intrinsic value.

1. Include within MPAs key and unique habitats identified by the SAT for this region.
    a. The SAT identified several key and unique habitats to be included in the Southern California section. All of these habitats concern unique bottom structures or substrates and nearshore features like kelp forests. The primary habitat HMS fishing will occur is away from these habitats in open

water. Any of these unique habitats will still remain protected as HMS or pelagic effort never occurs there enough.

2. Include and replicate, to the extent possible [practicable], representatives of all marine habitats identified in the MLPA or the California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas across a range of depths.
    a. This object mirrors the previous Goal 4.1 and requests protections exist across the listed unique habitats in a variety of depth ranges. The three MPAs in Petition2023-15MPA will still have the same protections on the habitat and local, non-pelagic species that live in said habitat.

MLPA Goal 5. To ensure that South Coast California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures, and adequate enforcement, and are based on sound scientific guidelines.

1. Minimize negative socioeconomic impacts and optimize positive socioeconomic impacts for all users including coastal dependent entities, communities, and interests, to the extent possible, and if consistent with the MLPA and its goals and guidelines.
    a. Opening these areas, to the requested levels of HMS or pelagic take the petition requests, would minimize the negative socioeconomic impacts these areas currently have while they are no-take. While total take of HMS will not increase by magnitudes, allowance of HMS take inside of the three MPAs will offer alternatives to fishermen on poor weather days due to the MPAs covering most of the consistently calm waters around the Channel Islands. This will not only help to increase local and cleaner commercial fisheries, but also offer benefits to recreational pelagic fisheries, especially catch-and-release marlin fisheries. All of this could be accomplished whilst still meeting the objectives of the MMP and protecting the species that these MPAs are meant for.

2. Provide opportunities for interested parties to help develop objectives, a long-term monitoring plan that includes standardized biological and socioeconomic monitoring protocols, a long-term education and outreach plan, and a strategy for MPA evaluation.
    a. This objective is somewhat out of the scope of Petition2023-15MPA in this analysis; however, any possible long term monitoring of the MPAs after a change like this is encouraged to validate the claims made in this petition, and that what we see as an effect of making this change is what we expect.

3. Effectively use scientific guidelines in the California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas.
    a. I urge the department and commission to follow these guidelines and MMP objectives for this petition process, as their is their entire purpose, and to understand that Petition2023-15MPA does in fact have explicit support from the MMP and by extension the MLPA. This analysis is meant to show that Petition2023-15MPA is adhering to most, if not all, of these scientific guidelines/objectives.

4. Ensure public understanding of, compliance with, and stakeholder support for MPA boundaries and regulations.
    a. While any limited-take area offers more complexity than a completely open or closed area, similar existing MPAs in the State that allow for pelagic take show the public can understand and follow regulations allowing take of a set list of species, pelagic finfish or HMS. Outside of MPAs, groundfish exclusion areas (GEAs), established federally, also mirror this petition by restricting only non-pelagic species take (groundfish take) but still allowing for all pelagic take displaying public understanding and enforcement feasibility.

    It goes without saying that among those that frequent the Channel Islands offshore areas for pelagic species, a petition like this has complete public support. I have been on the water around these islands for 25 years, and was a part of the first generation of anglers to grow up with these MPAs in effect. Throughout these years the call to allow pelagic access in these areas has existed throughout the local community, and without this call, this massive community driven consensus, this petition would have never existed.

    There are some who oppose this petition, there always will be; however, one thing I have yet to receive is a scientifically based reason for these areas to remain closed to HMS or pelagic species, all rational has been emotional. While there are research studies that show massive MPAs, those that rival the size of this State in area, may offer some benefits to pelagics, our Network simply does not and cannot accommodate that type of scale. In fact, a denied petition in 2020 by this Commission explicitly stated that on the record, when a petition requested an MPA be made for an HMS (white sharks) this commission's reply was to deny it because, “MPAs are intended to protect ecosystems, not individual species, especially highly mobile, pelagic species.” This precedent has been set

multiple times, there is no reason to not apply it to a set of MPAs that were made before it all, this is a textbook example of adaptive management.

5. Include simple, clear, and focused site-specific objectives/rationales for each MPA and ensure that site-level rationales for each MPA are linked to one or more regional objectives.
    a. The founding reasons for these MPAs at the Channel Islands in 2002 was the idea to protect our local, non-pelagic species, mainly groundfish at the time. These ideas are still reiterated today in the MPA summaries of all three of these MPAs, the focus on non-pelagic local species, birds, and mammals is clear. While the existing protections certainly can continue to accomplish that objective, Petition2023-15MPA offers a way we can both meet those same goals, and allow for some reasonable forms of take for pelagic species as we see elsewhere in the more modern MPA network. The rationales laid out in this document are evidence that under Petition2023-15MPA's changes we can still meet the same regional objectives we currently meet, plus those revolving around reasonable levels of pelagic take. These additional met objectives, and lower economic impacts make this petition one that arguably helps strengthen the overall network, not weaken it.

MLPA Goal 6. To ensure that the South Coast's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a component of a statewide network.

1. Provide opportunities to promote a process that informs adaptive management and includes stakeholder involvement for regional review and evaluation of management effectiveness to determine if regional MPAs are an effective component of a statewide network.
    a. We are currently in this adaptive management process as a result of the DMR which includes stakeholder involvement at Commission and MRC meetings discussing this and other MPA adaptive management petitions. While I wish official meetings could be held regionally for petitions I understand that is not doable for this specific process. That being said, unofficial meetings where locals attended (clubs, organizations, MPA Collaboratives) feedback on this petition was overwhelmingly positive.

2. Provide opportunities to coordinate with future MLPA regional stakeholder groups in other regions to ensure that the statewide MPA network meets the goals of the MLPA.

    a. This is already being done at the full commission and MRC levels where stakeholders across the State voice thoughts on regional MPA petitions. Stakeholder support for a petition like this is what one would generally expect, local fisheries/community support, statewide support from fisheries groups/organizations, and statewide lack of support from environmental organizations. It should again be mentioned that supporting reasons for petition2023-15MPA and how it is supported by both the objective and goals of the MMP and MLPA respectively, is the purpose of this document.

3. Ensure ecological connectivity within and between regional components of the statewide network.
    a. The Channel Islands network is unique in that it is partially isolated brom the Coastal MPA network. That being said, connectivity will still be occurring under an accepted petition in part or full as existing protections on species that actually benefit from these MPAs and their habitats will still remain protected. This will keep local species connectivity as strong as it has been under the current network. Pelagic species will still have local MPAs that are no-take at all four islands, in the border network, and far offshore (but still inside the EEZ) where little or no pressure exists on them.

4. Provide for protection and connectivity of habitat for those species that utilize different habitats over their lifetime.
    a. As mentioned in several of the above objectives, those species that utilize different habitats over their lifetime are primarily local, non-pelagic species. These species will remain completely protected. Pelagic and especially HMS are species that are in the open water, pelagic region their entire lives, from egg to maturity. All of the species proposed for limited take in Petition2023-15MPA have very limited, if any, interactions or movements between different habitats explicitly due to their life cycles.

The above analysis of the MPA Master Plan's objective based analysis process for adaptive management changes to the MPA network clearly shows that Petition2023-15MPA is supported by the MMP and the MLPA. Not only are there guiding objectives of the 2016 and 2008 MMPs that outright say we must provide areas for pelagic take and that pelagic species are less affected by MPAs, but here we have the Channel Islands network of MPAs that came into effect prior to any MMP providing almost no limited pelagic areas, nothing comparable to what we see in the more-modern coastal network that was guided by the MMP. This is a glowing example of the need for adaptive management in lieu of guiding management documents, CDFW

and FGC statements on previous petitions, and actual MPA implementations from the coastal MLPA that are based on our more-modern data and scientifically based evidence and outlook on MPAs. If I could only say one thing about this petition it would be: we can have pelagic allowed areas and our local protections without weakening the network just like we already have everywhere else. Please consider granting this petition.

Thank you,
Blake Hermann
Petitioner - Petition2023-15MPA

February 28, 2025

California Fish and Game Commission
Marine Resources Committee
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Submitted electronically to fgc@fgc.ca.gov

RE: Comments on Fish and Game Commission Marine Resources Committee March 2025 Meeting Agenda Item 5 A II: *MPA Regulation Change Petitions*

Dear Vice President Murray and Commissioner Sklar:

Thank you for your continued leadership on the Marine Resources Committee and for your commitment to fostering an inclusive and transparent process as California conducts its first adaptive management process of the statewide marine protected area (MPA) network. The undersigned organizations—representing the public interest, the environment, marine science, environmental justice, and recreational and subsistence fishing interests–are working to ensure that our MPA Network is resilient to the many stressors facing our shared ocean.

We write with three recommendations that pertain to the MPA network adaptive management process. The first supports a robust and inclusive public process, and the second, and third respond to recent changes in process and scientific literature.

1) Clearly define outreach criteria for petitioners, set a schedule for Bin 2 petition evaluations, and specify how evaluation criteria will be weighed

2) Distinguish between items to be addressed in front of the full commission versus the Marine Resources Committee
3) Incorporate new science in the adaptive management process to meet the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) requirement of considering current and future ocean conditions

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1) ***Clearly Define Outreach Criteria for Petitioners, Set a Schedule for Bin 2 Petition Evaluations, and Specify How Evaluation Criteria will be Weighed***

Our organizations are requesting that the Fish and Game Commission (FGC) outline specific needs and expectations for outreach associated with each petition. There has been extensive discourse in recent meetings regarding the equity of outreach communications, and as we move forward into Bin 2 petition evaluations, there should be clear expectations on this issue. The lack of clarity on this issue has led to misinformation, causing further division between interest groups in an already polarized landscape. Our organizations have deep experience in reaching out to our local communities and in engaging with diverse audiences statewide and beyond. We want to ensure a participatory process; and we also want to make sure that everyone feels safe, respected, and heard. We welcome a conversation at the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) about how to support this shared objective.

In the extensive outreach many of our organizations have undertaken, we have heard repeatedly that the execution of Recommendation 4 (i.e., Consider changes to the MPA network) is suffering from a lack of clear direction on when petitions will be evaluated. We strongly request that the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) publish a proposed schedule for Bin 2 petition evaluations and associated opportunities for public input. While we recognize that this is a dynamic and complex process, the lack of clarity on the timing for petition evaluations is creating confusion and frustration for many of the stakeholders and Tribes with whom we have connected. Many stakeholders have now been attending meetings on this topic for over a year. We understand that these processes are time-consuming – it would be helpful if future meetings could be focused on specific petitions, for instance.

Finally, we would like for the MRC to host a discussion on how each of the MPA petition criteria will be weighted in petition evaluations. Further, we would appreciate clarity around the verbal references to and documentation requirements for "historical context," and how it will interact with the science-based criteria (e.g., climate resilience). We refer you to our letter from the February FGC meeting in which we urge the Commission to use the guidance on adaptive management from the MLPA Master Plan.

2) ***Distinguish Between Items to be Addressed in Front of the Full Commission Versus the Marine Resources Committee***

During the February 2025 FGC meeting, commission staff had a discussion regarding commissioner attendance rules at the Marine Resource Committee (MRC) and there was interest expressed for a full-commission discussion on the elements of the petition process to ensure that all FGC Commissioners' expertise and perspectives are considered. Our organizations would first like to commend the leadership of these MRC discussions as we have found them to be extremely collaborative and balanced in their deliberations and discussions. We greatly value your balanced knowledge and expertise in coastal resource management that you bring to inform these discussions. Our coalition has repeatedly voiced support for the continuation of these informal, discussion-based settings at the MRC, and we reiterate that these meetings are crucial in ensuring perspectives from all sides of these issues are heard and considered.

This past February FGC meeting concluded with a recommendation of hosting an informal meeting that hosts the full commission instead of only the commissioners appointed to the MRC in a full commission committee meeting. Our organizations request more information about how the FGC will determine which items will be addressed in this venue. There must be a clear, transparent process for identifying which adaptive management petitions and activities will be discussed in front of the full commission. Any new meeting format will represent a shift in the petition process, and require the public to adjust its engagement with the FGC to meet new meeting cadences. It is critical for petitioners and members of the public to know what to expect with any new format, and when to expect it. It would also be helpful if advance notice is provided. We look forward to discussing this further at the upcoming MRC meeting.

3) ***Incorporate New Science in the Adaptive Management Process to Meet the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Requirement of Considering Current and Future Ocean Conditions***

We continue to emphasize that adaptive management recommendations and decisions must be firmly rooted in unbiased, peer-reviewed science. While anecdotal observations and emotions are valuable, scientific research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that fully and highly protected networks of MPAs benefit marine ecosystems and organisms. We all want to ensure that our coastal resources are abundant and sustainable for generations to come.

We request that CDFW consider recently published, peer-reviewed articles related to MPAs:

a) **Asokan, A. (2024). "Marine protected areas as a tool for environmental justice." Frontiers in Marine Science. https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2024.1478023.**
The linked article specifies that, "an MPA under the appropriate enabling conditions can be a tool to mitigate damage, distribute power, support other cultural value systems, and to advance our understanding of the ocean, climate change and diverse community impacts moving forward." The process of designing the MPA network left many

important community stakeholders out of the conversation, and this ongoing petition review process provides an opportunity to rectify past mistakes and design a network informed by principles of environmental justice as guided by scientific literature.

b) **Smith, J.G., et al. (2025). "Conservation benefits of a large marine protected area network that spans multiple ecosystems." Conservation Biology. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.14435.** A recent state-wide meta-analysis of California's MPAs shows how conservation benefits of MPAs extend across many different ecosystems, with targeted fish biomass being significantly greater inside no-take MPAs. They also assessed how MPAs were doing regionally and found that 3 of 4 regions (south, central, and northern central) exhibited significantly higher targeted fish biomass inside no-take MPAs across all protected ecosystems.

c) **Eisaguirre, J.H., et al. (2020). "Trophic redundancy and predator size class structure drive differences in kelp forest ecosystem dynamics." Ecology. https://doi.org/10.1002/ecy.2993.** Scientists investigating how to prevent widespread kelp forest ecosystem loss found that inside MPAs, kelp persisted and was healthier than outside protected areas. By reducing harvest on urchin predators inside MPAs, kelp recovery was able to occur, whereas outside the MPAs, less kelp forest persisted. Given increasing stressors our California ocean is being exposed to, applying the best available science to ensure the conservation of our marine ecosystems into the future is key.

These recent papers build on the already established science which shows the success of MPAs. Letters have also been submitted to the Commission indicating support from the scientific community for MPAs and expansion of the network.[1] Finally, we note that there are a host of scientific papers further describing findings from California's long-term monitoring that will be published in the coming weeks that can help inform the adaptive management process.

Thank you very much for considering these comments on the overall structure of addressing Bin 2 petitions. As always, we are happy to answer questions or discuss any of these items in further detail.

Sincerely,

Zoë Collins
Marine Protected Area Program Coordinator
Heal the Bay

Ashley Eagle-Gibbs,
Executive Director
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin

[1] For instance, see letter submitted from marine scientists to the Commission June 17, 2024 on this topic.

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