California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Evaluation of 2023 Decadal Management Review Marine Protected Area Petition:

Expand Boundaries of Cabrillo, Natural Bridges, Point Conception, South Point, and Gull Island SMRs, Point Dume SMCA, and Add a New SMCA at Pleasure Point (2023-33MPA_AM)

I. PETITION SUMMARY

CFGC Tracking Number	2023-33MPA_AM
Petition Contact/Affiliation	Laura Deehan, Environment California Research and Policy Center and Azul
Number of Proposed Actions	7
Affected MPAs	Cabrillo State Marine Reserve (SMR), Natural Bridges SMR, Point Conception SMR, South Point SMR, Gull Island SMR, Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA), and Pleasure Point SMCA (proposed new MPA)
Petition Summary	To protect kelp forest habitat, designate one new MPA and expand boundaries at six existing MPAs; add new take allowance at Point Dume SMCA.
Link to StoryMap page	2023-33MPA_AM

March 2026

II. CDFW RECOMMENDATIONS AND BRIEF JUSTIFICATION

Note: If a change to the marine protected area (MPA) regulations is not needed to address the proposed change, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) did not evaluate the proposed change using the framework. However, CDFW may recommend an alternative pathway to achieving the desired outcome of the proposed change.

Petition Action ID and Proposed Action	Petitioner's Stated Rationale and Brief Justification for Proposed Actions	CDFW Recommendation and Brief Justification
2023-33MPA_1-7 Expand six MPAs and establish a new MPA to protect kelp.	The petitioner's stated intent for the proposed change is to protect kelp beds identified by recent analyses as highly persistent, historically stable, and currently in good condition. The petitioner states, "removing, to the extent possible, direct human impacts on these resilient kelp forests that are potential climatic refuges will not only help these areas persist, but will also enhance the state's restoration efforts for other kelp forests in decline."	**Deny 2023-33MPA_1-7.** The following applies to all proposed actions in the petition. Additional considerations for individual MPAs are included below. The proposed actions are not anticipated to improve the MPA Network from either an ecological or management perspective. The proposed changes would not advance management recommendations from the Decadal Management Review (DMR) or current or emerging MPA management challenge (CDFW 2022). While kelp declines and climate change are key issues of concern, the proposed actions are not the most effective solutions. In addition, the proposed changes do not align with the original intent of the affected MPAs. The petition relies on the premise that expanding MPAs to encompass kelp patches identified as particularly persistent will meaningfully improve kelp stability, resilience, and/or recovery. However, this is not supported by site-specific

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		mechanistic evidence. While MPAs remain a core conservation tool, they are not a standalone or flexible mechanism for supporting kelp restoration or enhancing kelp persistence, and implementation could introduce regulatory constraints that limit future restoration opportunities. Kelp restoration and management efforts should be guided by the forthcoming Kelp Restoration and Management Plan (KRMP), which will provide the framework for developing and implementing effective kelp management strategies and best practices for kelp restoration. The proposed MPA expansions and new MPA may have the potential to interact with the regulations and permitting activities of various federal and state agencies, including the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and Regional Water Quality Control Board (regional water boards; collectively, Water Boards) related to point source (e.g., wastewater treatment facilities) and non-point source discharges (e.g., stormwater runoff) into Marine Managed Areas. The DMR indicated the MPA Network as designed is meeting expectations and functioning effectively to achieve the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) (CDFW 2022).

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		Therefore, significant regulatory changes to the MPA Network should meet a high threshold of demonstrated conservation value and need, as well as clear, science-supported benefit built off rigorous scientific analysis, robust tribal and stakeholder engagement, and iterative statewide collaboration to ensure the scientific integrity of the MPA Network and the mandates of the MLPA are met.
2023-33MPA_1_AM1 Expand Cabrillo State Marine Reserve (SMR) westward (to 3-mile state line) and northward (to New Hope Rock) by ~9.99 sq mi.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** Expansion to the 3 nautical mile (nm) limit of state waters is not necessary to achieve the petition's stated objective of protecting kelp, which is largely confined to shallow waters less than approximately 98 feet (30 m) in depth. The proposed action also conflicts with the original intent of this MPA, which was deliberately designed to protect nearshore habitats while minimizing socioeconomic impacts, particularly to the lobster fishery. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Cabrillo SMR. In addition, the U.S. Navy opposes this MPA expansion due to concerns that the expansion would create operational constraints to military readiness.
2023-33MPA_2_AM1 Expand Point Dume State Marine Conservation Area	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** The proposed additional take allowance of recreational hook-and-line fishing from shore would conflict with the

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(SMCA) westward by 4.6 sq mi. and add allowance for recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and by spearfishing.		intent of the MPA and compromise the designed function of the Point Dume SMCA/SMR cluster such that it would no longer serve as a backbone/replicate MPA for kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, and soft bottom habitats. This would create a substantial spacing gap between these habitats and diminish MPA Network functionality. During the MLPA Initiative planning process, this MPA cluster was intentionally designed to have a High (Point Dume SMCA) and Very High (Point Dume SMR) Level of Protection (LOP) so that it would serve as a habitat replicate and facilitate connectivity with the rest of the MPA Network. Implementing the proposed change would reduce the LOP to Moderate-low, which would compromise the design of the individual MPA as well as the MPA Network. During the MLPA Initiative planning process, all alternatives for take regulations in the SMCA were deliberately developed to allow some fishing activities while maintaining the High-LOP backbone cluster at Point Dume. None of the alternatives contemplated the inclusion of hook-and-line fishing from shore because this would result in a Moderate-Low LOP. The present proposal would not only change the intentional MPA design, but it would also change the MPA cluster design and

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		function so that it no longer serves as a habitat replicate, weakening the MPA Network. The proposed MPA expansion would also unnecessarily limit recreational and commercial fishing in the area proposed for expansion, the socioeconomic impacts of which are unknown. The majority of the proposed MPA expansion lies within a high-value commercial fishing block. Expanded boundaries for Point Dume were considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process and deliberately not retained by the Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) and California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) because the final configuration achieved the goal of maximizing habitat replication while minimizing impacts to consumptive uses. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Point Dume SMCA. Additionally, the proposed change would not align with the CDFW Feasibility Guidelines because the boundaries are not described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude, and it is unclear if the landmarks suggested by the petitioner to identify the proposed boundaries are easily recognizable for both shore- and boat-based users. This, along with the addition of a new take allowance could also create enforcement challenges.

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2023-33MPA_3 Expand South Point SMR westward by 26.3 sq mi.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** The proposed expansion would not meaningfully improve the design of South Point SMR or the MPA Network, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR. During the Channel Islands MPA planning process, expanded boundaries to capture more kelp forest were considered at South Point SMR. However, as a deliberate outcome of the process, the western area towards Bee Rock/Cluster Point was not retained in the final design due to concerns that the additional area would significantly increase economic impacts to fisheries, particularly for lobster and urchin, which are concerns that remain relevant today. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding South Point SMR.
2023-33MPA_4 Expand Gull Island SMR northward by 1.8 sq mi.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** Gull Island SMR currently meets the criteria necessary to support MPA Network ecological objectives and contributes to Network-wide habitat replication of several key habitats, including kelp. The proposed expansion would not meaningfully improve the design of Gull Island SMR or the MPA Network, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

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		The petition proposes to expand the MPA north to include Posa Anchorage on the southwest side of Santa Cruz Island. This area was initially included in the working draft recommendation developed by CDFW and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) during the Channel Islands MPA planning process but was later redesigned to exclude the anchorage. This decision remains relevant today. Inclusion of this area would impose unnecessary socioeconomic impacts, particularly to the squid fishery. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding the boundary of Gull Island SMR.
2023-33MPA_5 Expand Point Conception SMR eastward by 14.6 sq mi.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** Point Conception SMR currently meets the criteria necessary to support MPA Network ecological objectives and contributes to Network-wide habitat replication of several key habitats, including kelp. The proposed expansion would add incidental benefit to the MPA Network by adding an additional replicate for nearshore hard substrate but would not improve spacing between habitats to better meet Science Guidelines or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR. Expanded boundaries were considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process. The boundaries ultimately implemented reflect a deliberate compromise to optimize both conservation and fishing

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		priorities. Expanding the boundaries would alter this intentional balance and introduce avoidable socioeconomic impacts, particularly to recreational fisheries and the commercial nearshore groundfish and squid fisheries. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding the boundary of Point Conception SMR. In addition, the proposed change would compromise MPA design by changing the boundary from one that aligns with Feasibility Guidelines to one that does not, which could create unnecessary enforcement challenges.
2023-33MPA_6_AM1 Expand Natural Bridges SMR southward and eastward to the edge of Natural Bridges State Beach by ~14.5 sq mi.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** Expansion of Natural Bridges SMR into deeper offshore waters is unnecessary to achieve the petitioner's stated objective of protecting kelp, which is largely confined to shallow nearshore waters (generally < 100 feet (~30 m) depth). The proposed action is also inconsistent with the original intent of this MPA, which was deliberately designed to protect intertidal and nearshore habitats while minimizing socioeconomic impacts near Santa Cruz Harbor. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant the expansion of Natural Bridges SMR. Lastly, the proposed change would compromise MPA design by creating a hanging corner where the offshore boundary does not fully

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		align with the 3 nm state water limit, which could introduce enforcement challenges.
2023-33MPA_7_AM1 Designate 3.2 sq mi. as a new SMCA near Pleasure Point (Santa Cruz); allow recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and spearfishing only.	See stated rationale and brief justification for 2023-33MPA_1-7.	**Deny.** Due to its small size and Moderate-low LOP, the proposed new SMCA near Pleasure Point would not contribute to Network ecological objectives, improve MPA Network design or function, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR. The proposed new MPA is also not expected to fulfill the stated objective of supporting kelp resilience. A small, Low-LOP MPA at this location was previously considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process and not adopted. The petition does not provide sufficient evidence to warrant the creation of a small MPA with minimal protection at Pleasure Point. The proximity of the proposed new MPA to Santa Cruz Harbor is expected to impose substantial socioeconomic impacts. Additionally, the boundaries of the proposed MPA do not align with Feasibility Guidelines, which may create enforcement challenges.

III. BIN 2 PETITION GROUPING: IDENTIFY TRIBALLY-LED PETITIONS

The 2023 MPA Petition Companion Document (Attachment 1) includes a summary of the process for identifying Tribally-led petitions, CDFW's outreach to all California Native American tribes[1] (tribes) throughout the petitions process, and a summary of outreach and engagement with Tribally-led petitioners. Tribally-led petitions were evaluated with CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework.

Tribal Components Questions	Answer and Explanation
Was the petition submitted by a California Native American tribe, representative designated by a tribe or tribal organization, or have a tribal co-sponsor? If yes, a. Does the proposed change explicitly aim to advance tribal co-management, subsistence harvesting, stewardship, and/or provide a tribal benefit through recognizing the cultural significance of an area? b. Is the proposed regulatory change explicitly linked to a tribe or tribes? (i.e. tribal exemption, tribal take only MPA, or new MPA for co-management).	No, the petition was not submitted by a tribe or representative designated by a tribe, nor does it have a tribal co-sponsor.

[1] California Native American tribe is the preferred term to use per the Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs when generally mentioning tribes of California, both federally and non-federally recognized.

IV. PETITION EVALUATION

EVALUATION NARRATIVE AND OVERVIEW FOR 2023-33MPA_AM

The petitioner has requested to: expand the boundaries of Cabrillo SMR, Point Dume SMCA, South Point SMR, Gull Island SMR, Point Conception SMR, and Natural Bridges SMR; establish a new 3.2 mi^2 SMCA at Pleasure Point in Santa Cruz that allows recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and spearfishing; and add a new take allowance at Point Dume SMCA (recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and spearfishing). The proposed changes are intended to enhance protections for kelp forests. The petitioner asserts that the proposed expansions and new MPA would encompass patches of kelp identified by recent analyses (Arafeh-Dalmau et al. 2021; Arafeh-Dalmau et al. 2023; Giraldo-Ospina et al. 2023) as particularly stable, resilient, and persistent, and that protection of more kelp in MPAs would "preserve what we have left, and increase our chances of restoration in the future."

While the petitioner asserts that the proposed actions align with several goals of the MLPA, CDFW's evaluation finds that the proposal:

- Is not anticipated to improve the design of the MPA Network from either an ecological or an MPA management perspective (and in some cases compromises MPA Network design),
- Does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR or address a current or emerging MPA management challenge,
- Is inconsistent with the goals and original intent of the affected MPAs and the broader MPA Network,
- Should not be considered without guidance from the forthcoming KRMP,
- Is expected to introduce unnecessary costs and impacts that outweigh expected benefits, and
- Does not align with guidance outlined in the Master Plan for MPAs (CDFW 2016) for what would warrant significant changes to the MPA Network, which requires a demonstrable science-supported benefit to the MPA Network.

Kelp Management and MPAs

The petition for these regulatory changes is not anticipated to improve the MPA Network from either an ecological or a management perspective because current scientific evidence does not support the use of MPAs as a standalone targeted solution to kelp management in the absence of site-specific justification.

There are two canopy-forming kelp species in California. Giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) is abundant south of San Francisco and bull kelp (*Nereocystis luetkeana*) is the dominant species north of Davenport, in Santa Cruz County. A number of biotic and abiotic factors influence the distribution and persistence of both species, including depth, water temperature, seascape complexity, substrate type, competition, and grazing pressure (Foster and Schiel 1985, Steneck et al. 2002, Ricart et al. 2025). The influence of anthropogenic, often climate-driven, stressors on kelp forest ecosystems has intensified in recent years, at times producing unexpected interactive effects that can restructure kelp forest ecosystems. A widely cited example is the catastrophic kelp decline along much of the coast, with particularly acute impacts to bull kelp in northern California, which has been linked to a 'perfect storm' of prolonged abnormally warm waters stemming from a marine heatwave and subsequent El Niño event in 2014-16, the effective extirpation of a key predator to disease, and the ensuing herbivore population growth that intensified grazing pressure (Harvell et al. 2019, Rogers-Bennett and Catton 2019, Eisaguirre et al. 2020). Other localized stressors, such as pollution, sedimentation, water darkening, and invasive species establishment, may also have cumulative impacts on kelp vulnerability to disturbance (Foster and Schiel 2010, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024). These may be further mediated by the effects of historical harvest on the population dynamics and demographic structure of key kelp forest species, such as California sheephead (*Bodianus* (formerly *Semicossyphus) pulcher*) and California spiny lobster (*Panulirus interruptus*) (Lenihan et al. 2021; Ziegler et al. 2022; Kumagai et al. 2024; Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025).

These dynamics demonstrate why kelp forests are particularly challenging to study and manage. Their hysteretic nature, high spatial and temporal variability, and complex ecological structure can obscure detection of drivers and mechanisms behind large differences at various scales (Foster 1990, Hamilton et al. 2022, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). As a result, simply identifying patches of kelp that appear persistent does not provide evidence of the operational drivers at those sites or the management strategy most likely to be effective, and protecting more kelp is, on its own, not necessarily the most effective way to support large-scale kelp persistence or resilience.

Considering this, and in response to recent declines, a large body of research has emerged investigating the capacity of kelp forests to resist and recover from disturbance, identify the drivers connected to metrics of resilience, and explore whether MPA protection can support kelp resilience. MPAs are well documented to support higher abundance, biomass, density, diversity, and reproductive output of many organisms, including in kelp forest ecosystems (Lester et al. 2009, Hamilton et al. 2010, Edgar et al. 2014, Caselle et al. 2015, Lenihan et al. 2021, Lenihan et al. 2022). It has been theorized that these direct effects of MPA protection may translate into broader ecosystem resilience through a variety of pathways. Communities inside MPAs may be more resistant to

disturbance and better able to recover afterward due to increased functional redundancy, greater genetic and demographic diversity, improved individual condition, and enhanced community stability (Bates et al. 2019, Jacquemont et al. 2022, Eisaguirre et al. 2020, Kumagai et al. 2024, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). One commonly predicted mechanism is the trophic cascade, whereby recovery of predators inside MPAs suppresses herbivore populations, indirectly supporting kelp recruitment, survival, and growth (Ripple et al. 2016).

The petitioner highlights some of this research suggesting that MPAs can support kelp forest stability (Eisaguirre et al. 2020, Kawamoto and Taino 2021, House and Allen 2022, Heineke et al. 2023, Peleg et al. 2023) as justification for expanding MPAs for kelp protection. In so doing, there may be an implicit assumption that these mechanisms are broadly and reliably present across the MPA Network, and that expanding MPAs will predictably increase or maintain kelp forest stability, recovery, or persistence. However, empirical evidence for the capacity of MPAs to improve kelp resilience has been equivocal, and outcomes appear strongly dependent on species, context, and scale. Around the world, many studies demonstrate resilience benefits for kelp forest fish and invertebrate communities, as well as for kelp itself (Micheli et al. 2012, Eisaguirre et al. 2020, Peleg et al. 2023, Ziegler et al. 2023, Benedetti-Cecchi et al. 2024, Kumagai et al. 2024, Olguin-Jacobson et al. 2025, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). In California's MPA Network, results from the first DMR indicated that kelp canopy was more stable and resilient in MPAs, particularly in the South Coast (CDFW 2022). At the same time, other studies have found contradictory or unexpected results, including inconsistent kelp responses to protection, variable evidence for trophic cascades, examples in which MPAs did not prevent kelp forest community shifts during marine heatwaves, and evidence for other independent mechanisms or region-specific drivers of kelp resilience (Foster 1990; Lester et al. 2009; Gilby and Stevens 2014; Roberts et al. 2017; Turnbull et al. 2018; Freedman et al. 2020; Malakhoff and Miller 2021; Barrientos et al. 2022; Smith et al. 2023; Kumagai et al. 2024; Reis et al. 2024; Cavanaugh et al. 2025; Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025; Ricart et al. 2025; Shrestha et al. 2025; Thoroude et al. 2025).

Overall, MPAs do not consistently or predictably confer resilience to kelp and therefore cannot be considered a standalone kelp restoration tool without site-specific mechanistic evidence, particularly when the dominant drivers operate beyond MPA borders (Mora and Sale 2011, Gilby and Stevens 2014, Bates et al. 2019, Arkema et al. 2024, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). In short, the general proposition that MPAs can improve kelp is not equivalent to a site-specific prediction that MPA expansion will meaningfully improve kelp persistence or recovery. Therefore, using MPAs as a targeted site-specific management tool for protecting existing kelp canopy or regeneration potential is not currently considered an appropriate pathway.

This does not mean that MPAs lack value for kelp forests. While MPAs are not a panacea and cannot stop marine heatwaves or other large-scale effects of climate change, they remain a foundational conservation tool that can reduce local stressors, rebuild populations of key species, and support ecosystem-based management goals (Roberts et al. 2017, Lopazanski et al. 2023, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024). They also provide a valuable platform for long-term monitoring in unmanipulated ecosystems, supporting opportunities for detecting ecosystem change, evaluating climate impacts, and distinguishing the effects of MPA protection from high natural background variability (Bates et al. 2019, Hall-Arber et al. 2021). As noted by a working group convened to support the DMR, continued comprehensive monitoring is critical to understanding the capacity of the MPA Network to resist and recover from future heatwave events (Hofmann et al. 2021). Absent direct evidence from long-term monitoring indicating that relevant mechanisms are locally present and responsive to protection, there is no scientific basis to expect that the proposed actions in this petition are the most effective tools to meaningfully improve kelp resilience or recovery.

Addressing kelp declines throughout the state is a priority. In response, CDFW, in partnership with the Ocean Protection Council, is developing a statewide, ecosystem-based, adaptive Kelp Restoration Management Plan (KRMP), which will serve as the comprehensive planning document for the sustainable management of giant and bull kelp throughout the state. The KRMP will include a cohesive kelp management strategy that consists of three core components:

1. An innovative framework for ecosystem-based management of kelp forests,
2. A harvest management framework and other Fishery Management Plan elements required by the Marine Life Management Act, and
3. A Restoration Toolkit.

The KRMP will include a robust, adaptive, climate-ready approach to managing the state's kelp forest ecosystems in the face of changing ocean conditions. The KRMP will help identify ecological priorities, site selection criteria, and management frameworks to guide future kelp management and restoration activities.

Furthermore, as resources become available, CDFW plans to develop a decision-making framework for considering restoration activities more broadly within the state's MPAs (DMR Recommendation 18), recognizing that one of the mandates of the MLPA is that MPAs act as living laboratories where research and monitoring can occur without the influence of human activities.

Ultimately, MPAs are one tool within a broader management strategy for climate adaptation and kelp recovery (Roberts et al. 2017, Jacquemont et al. 2022, Lopazanski et

al. 2023, Arkema et al. 2024, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024). There is not sufficient evidence to support that the proposed MPA expansions would be an effective mechanism for kelp protection and restoration, particularly absent location-specific justification. In addition, expanding or designating new MPAs for kelp recovery may introduce regulatory constraints that complicate, delay, or limit restoration actions (Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024). As highlighted in DMR Recommendations 9 and 25, MPAs will continue to play a strategic role in marine conservation, but future effectiveness will likely depend on integrating climate considerations into MPA design, continuing long-term monitoring, and pairing MPAs with complementary approaches where appropriate (Hamilton et al. 2022, Arafeh-Dalmau et al. 2023, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024, Kumagai et al. 2024). The KRMP and outcomes of DMR Recommendation 18 are needed to inform decisions about the role of MPAs in kelp restoration and management before updating the MPA regulations.

MPA-Specific Concerns

In addition to the fact that the proposed expansions and new MPA are not likely to address the petitioner's desired outcome of "protecting the natural regeneration potential of kelp forest ecosystems statewide," the following section includes additional concerns related to the specific MPAs the petition is proposing to expand or establish and the proposal to add recreational take by hook and line and spearfishing to Point Dume SMCA. Many of the proposed expansions do not improve MPA Network design and, in some cases, would conflict with and possibly undermine the original intent of the affected MPAs.

Cabrillo SMR:
The petitioner proposes expanding Cabrillo SMR to enhance kelp protection. Though not the petitioner's stated intent, the proposed expansion would enhance the design of the MPA with respect to minimum size criteria established by the Science Advisory Team (SAT) during the MLPA Initiative planning process, and, in that sense, improve MPA Network design (Table 1). However, a much larger version of Cabrillo SMR was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process and deliberately not retained by the BRTF and CFGC. This reflects a deliberate decision to delineate Cabrillo SMR as a relatively small, nearshore MPA with a focus on protecting rocky intertidal and nearshore habitats while minimizing socioeconomic impacts (MLPA 2009a). That design continues to serve its stated ecological role of protecting species like kelp. Kelp is restricted to inhabit the shallow photic zone, as the ideal depth range for giant kelp in California is ~16-65 feet (~5-20 meters) (Foster and Schiel 1985). The petition includes a proposal to expand Cabrillo SMR into deeper waters beyond the depth that kelp can physically grow, which would not achieve the petitioner's stated conservation objective of protecting kelp. The proposed expansion would also reduce access to offshore fishing grounds, especially for the commercial lobster fleet (Fig. 1), thereby introducing unnecessary socioeconomic

impacts that were intentionally limited through the original MPA design. In addition, the U.S. Navy has expressed opposition to the Cabrillo SMR expansion since it would encroach on waters used for various military activities, another operational conflict that was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process and avoided by the original design. The proposed change would require additional discussions with the Navy pursuant to mandates in Fish & G. Code section 2863.

Point Dume SMCA:
The petitioner proposes expanding Point Dume SMCA to enhance kelp protection and adding a take allowance for recreational shore-based hook-and-line fishing. Point Dume SMCA and neighboring Point Dume SMR act together as an MPA cluster that currently meets the criteria necessary to contribute to MPA Network ecological objectives, such as habitat replication and representation, in a key section of coastline (Table 2). Adding the proposed take allowance would lower the SMCA's LOP from High to Moderate-low. As a result, the MPA cluster at Point Dume would no longer serve its designed ecological function for habitat replication and representation in this area, thereby creating a considerable spacing gap in this stretch of coastline. This would substantially compromise the design of the MPA and weaken the MPA Network as a whole. While adding shore-based hook-and-line fishing would increase recreational access, this action would not further the petitioner's stated goal of "removing…direct human impacts." The consumptive activities currently allowed in this SMCA were deliberately chosen during the MLPA Initiative planning process to generate support from a wide range of consumptive and conservation interests while maintaining a High LOP (MLPA 2009a). The addition of a lower LOP allowance represents a significant departure from a carefully negotiated balance intentionally established by the original design.

With respect to the proposed expansion, the existing Point Dume MPA cluster already meets SAT guidelines for size, spacing, and replication of a number of key habitats. Expanding boundaries would not add any additional replicated habitats but rather compromise the design of the Point Dume MPA cluster. Extended boundaries were considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process (MLPA 2009b), and the specific configuration ultimately implemented was deliberately chosen to maximize habitat replication with minimal impacts to fisheries (MLPA 2009a). The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding or adding the take allowance to Point Dume SMCA. The proposed changes would alter an intentionally adopted design of the Point Dume MPA cluster and compromise the ecological MPA Network design and function without advancing adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

South Point SMR:
The petitioner proposes expanding South Point SMR to enhance kelp protection. South Point SMR currently meets the criteria necessary to support MPA Network ecological

objectives and contributes to Network-wide habitat replication of several key habitats, including kelp. Habitat replication thresholds are based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of the species diversity associated with a particular habitat. Because South Point SMR already meets these guidelines, the proposed expansion would not improve South Point SMR's role in the MPA Network because it would not meet any additional Network-scale design objectives beyond those already achieved. Although the proposed expansion would increase the amount of kelp protected from 3.78 to 11.96 linear miles (Table 3), the petition does not provide site-specific evidence demonstrating that protecting additional kelp area would result in measurable, biologically meaningful benefits beyond what is already provided by South Point SMR. Expansion of the western boundary, similar to the present proposed action, was explored during the Channel Islands MPA planning process and intentionally not adopted due to the excessive projected impact to multiple fisheries (CINMS 2002). The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding South Point SMR.

Furthermore, in considering and weighing decisions to amend portions of the MPA Network around the Channel Islands, it is important to note the Channel Islands MPAs were established through a joint state/federal community-based process and respective state and federal rulemaking processes with aligned MPA goals and regulations, and have been co-managed by the state, CINMS, and Channel Islands National Park. South Point SMR was expanded into federal waters by NOAA regulations cited in the Federal Register (NOAA 2007). Thus, expanding the boundaries of this MPA would result in misalignment with the boundaries in the adjoining Federal Marine Reserve. Since the implementation of this MPA, NOAA Sanctuaries has not indicated to CDFW that boundary modifications are needed to better support the goals of this MPA. Therefore, the proposed expansion of South Point SMR would alter an intentionally adopted design without improving the ecological MPA Network design or function, or advancing adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Gull Island SMR:
The petitioner proposes expanding Gull Island SMR to enhance kelp protection. Gull Island SMR currently meets the criteria necessary to support MPA Network ecological objectives and contributes to Network-wide habitat replication of several key habitats, including kelp. Habitat replication thresholds are based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of the species diversity associated with a particular habitat. Because Gull Island SMR already meets these guidelines, the proposed expansion would not enable Gull Island SMR to meet any additional Network-scale design objectives beyond those already achieved. Although the proposed expansion of this SMR would yield an increase in the amount of kelp protected from 3.11 to 5.70 linear miles (Table 4), the petition does not provide site-specific evidence demonstrating that protecting additional kelp area would result in measurable, biologically meaningful benefits beyond

what is already provided. Expanded boundaries, as proposed here, were originally considered during the Channel Islands MPA planning process and deliberately modified to the existing shape to exclude Posa Anchorage on the northwest side of the SMR (CINMS 2002). The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Gull Island SMR. Therefore, the proposed expansion would alter an intentionally adopted design without improving the ecological MPA Network design or function, or advancing adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Point Conception SMR:
The petitioner proposes expanding Point Conception SMR to enhance kelp protection. Point Conception SMR currently meets the criteria necessary to support MPA Network ecological objectives and contributes to Network-wide habitat replication of several key habitats, including kelp. Habitat replication thresholds are based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of the species diversity associated with a particular habitat. Although the proposed expansion of this SMR would yield an increase in the amount of kelp protected from 2.27 to 6.47 linear miles (Table 5), the petition does not provide site-specific evidence demonstrating that protecting additional kelp area would result in measurable, biologically meaningful benefits beyond what is already provided. The expansion would enable the SMR to function as a replicate for one additional habitat (nearshore hard bottom) but would not improve the MPA Network's ability to meet spacing guidelines beyond what is currently provided. The proposed expansion would not meaningfully improve the design of Point Conception SMR or the MPA Network, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Throughout the three rounds of MPA array development during the MLPA Initiative planning process, a large SMR at Point Conception was consistently included in most proposals, with many proposing an eastern boundary extended beyond what was ultimately implemented (MLPA 2009b). The design of the existing shape is the result of deliberate compromise between consumptive and conservation priorities (MLPA 2009a). Therefore, the proposed expansion would alter an intentionally adopted design and likely reintroduce socioeconomic impacts that were explicitly avoided during the planning process. The proposed expansion would especially affect the commercial squid fishery (Fig. 2). The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Point Conception SMR. Lastly, the proposed expansion would reduce alignment with Feasibility Guidelines, which could create enforcement challenges.

Natural Bridges SMR:
The petitioner proposes expanding Natural Bridges SMR to enhance kelp protection. Though not the petitioner's stated intent, the proposed expansion would enhance the design of the MPA with respect to minimum size criteria established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process, and, in that sense, strengthen MPA Network design

(Table 6). However, the expansion would be inconsistent with the original intent and objectives of the MPA. While an external group submitted a proposed array that included a much larger version of Natural Bridges SMR, this proposal was deliberately not retained by the BRTF and CFGC. This reflects a deliberate decision to delineate Natural Bridges SMR as a relatively small, nearshore MPA with a focus on protecting rocky intertidal and other nearshore habitats while minimizing impacts to consumptive activities near Santa Cruz Harbor. That design continues to serve its stated ecological role of protecting species like kelp, which is restricted to the shallow photic zone (the ideal depth range for giant kelp in California is ~16-65 feet (5-20 meters; Foster and Schiel 1985). Expansion into deeper waters beyond the depths that kelp can physically grow as proposed in the petition would not achieve the petitioner's stated conservation objective of protecting kelp. The proposed expansion would also reduce access to offshore fishing grounds, thereby reintroducing socioeconomic impacts that were intentionally limited through the original design. Lastly, the proposed expansion would reduce alignment with Feasibility Guidelines, which could create enforcement challenges. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Natural Bridges SMR. The proposed expansion would not meaningfully improve the design of Natural Bridges SMR or the MPA Network, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Establish a New MPA: Pleasure Point SMCA:
The petitioner proposes creating Pleasure Point SMCA to enhance kelp protection. The proposed new MPA would be 3.1 square miles with a Moderate-low LOP which would not meet the minimum Science Guidelines for MPA size (≥9 square miles) or LOP (Table 7). Given this, the proposed design would not be expected to offer robust localized protection and is thus unlikely to deliver the ecological benefits anticipated by the petitioner. More broadly, the design is incompatible with contributing to MPA Network-scale ecological or conservation goals. A small MPA in this location was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process (MLPA 2006) for the purpose of protecting large surfgrass beds and associated invertebrates, but was rejected, likely due to the lack of meaningful ecological benefits offered by its proposed small size and Low LOP. The petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant the creation of a small MPA with minimal protection at Pleasure Point. Additionally, the proposed new MPA's proximity to Santa Cruz Harbor and valuable fishing areas is likely to adversely impact consumptive users without adding demonstrable value to the overall MPA Network. The proposed new MPA would not meaningfully contribute to the MPA Network or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Other Network-wide Considerations

During the MLPA Initiative planning process, socioeconomic analyses were available to inform MPA array design proposals (i.e., static economic impact analyses based on

participatory surveys, dynamic bioeconomic modeling based on larval connectivity and associated fishery participant behavior). The petitioner asserts that short-term socioeconomic impacts to recreational and commercial fisheries would be offset by future benefits to fisheries. However, socioeconomic data were not included in the petition, and CDFW was unable to develop the location-specific socioeconomic analyses or broader statewide fishery impacts needed to substantiate the claim. CDFW does not recommend considering these significant MPA expansions or new MPAs until this critical information gap is filled.

The proposed actions would also introduce additional regulatory and implementation complexity and cost that is not commensurate with the expected benefits. For example, several MPAs overlap with federally managed areas, including National Marine Sanctuaries, which would necessitate coordination with federal partners. Additionally, in the Northern Channel Islands, state MPAs with corresponding offshore federal marine reserves, such as South Point and Gull Islands SMRs, may require a corresponding expansion in federal waters to maintain alignment. Similarly, the state's existing MPAs are State Water Quality Protection Areas (SWQPAs), designated by the State Water Board pursuant to the California Ocean Plan (State Water Board 2019). It is unclear how the Implementation Provisions for Marine Managed Areas in the California Ocean Plan would interact with the proposed MPA expansions. However, if the State Water Board identifies the expanded areas as part of the SWQPAs, the regional water boards would need to update permits associated with point source (e.g., wastewater treatment plants) and non-point source (e.g., stormwater runoff) discharges into these Marine Managed Areas. The regional water boards' workload associated with updating permits and cost of compliance associated with new permit requirements for permittees is unknown.

The DMR did not identify the need for significant structural changes to the MPA Network. Ecological responses to protection in California's marine ecosystems are expected to require long timeframes to become detectable, and the MPA Network remains relatively young (Hall-Arber et al. 2021). Data and information evaluated in the first DMR indicate that the Network as designed is meeting expectations and functioning effectively in meeting MLPA Goals (CDFW 2022). The DMR highlighted that more time, data, and information is needed to truly assess vulnerabilities in the MPA Network and that it is expected that ecosystem resilience will continue to strengthen as ecological benefits from MPA protection continue to build over time (CDFW 2022).

Without demonstrated performance flaws or science-supported needs, significant design changes are not justified. Part of MPA adaptive management includes a "learning-by-doing" approach where long-term scientific monitoring results are expertly evaluated through periodic review and regulations adjusted, if needed. Approving a proposal of this magnitude without scientific justification or demonstrable benefit sets a

precedent that risks undermining the ecological value and scientific integrity of the MPA Network and the mandates of the MLPA.

MPA Network stability also provides important benefits, and maintaining a high threshold for change is necessary to protect the integrity and effectiveness of the MPA Network. Frequent or inadequately justified changes to the MPA Network can undermine public understanding and support, complicate enforcement, disrupt long-term monitoring and research designs, and impose costs across each of the management pillars. Each change to the MPA Network, even a minor one, carries implementation costs. Based on the available information, there is no indication that expanding these six existing MPAs or establishing a new SMCA would deliver meaningful ecological or management value to the Network, and in some cases, would compromise the design and enforceability of the existing MPA Network.

CDFW is committed to proactive adaptive management of the MPA Network. However, any structural changes must be grounded in demonstrated need, sound science, and an inclusive statewide process consistent with the MLPA's mandates and intent. The proposed actions do not meet these standards. Given this, and the lack of direct evidence linking specific drivers of kelp decline or recovery to specific areas, expanding or designating new MPAs in the proposed locations to protect kelp or potential kelp habitat is not recommended at this time. A more effective and adaptive approach to protecting California's iconic kelp forests lies in advancing ecosystem-based management and restoration efforts through the forthcoming KRMP, which will provide a transparent and adaptive framework to address kelp declines directly while incorporating emerging science and balancing ecological, socioeconomic, and cultural considerations.

RECOMMENDATION FOR 2023-33MPA_AM

Given these considerations, and the information in the evaluation below, **CDFW recommends CFGC DENY the proposed actions**:

- **2023-33MPA_1_AM1,** Expand Cabrillo SMR westward and northward by ~9.99 square miles,
- **2023-33MPA_2_AM1,** Expand Point Dume SMCA westward by 4.6 square miles and add allowance for recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and by spearfishing,
- **2023-33MPA_3,** Expand South Point SMR westward by 26.3 square miles,
- **2023-33MPA_4,** Expand Gull Island SMR northward by 1.8 square miles,
- **2023-33MPA_5,** Expand Point Conception SMR eastward by 14.6 square miles,
- **2023-33MPA_6_AM1,** Expand Natural Bridges SMR southward and eastward by ~14.5 square miles, and

- **2023-33MPA_7_AM1**: Designate 3.2 square miles as a new SMCA near Pleasure Point in Santa Cruz; allow recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and by spearfishing.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

2023-33MPA_1_AM1: Expand Cabrillo SMR westward (to 3 nm state line) and northward (to New Hope Rock) by 9.99 sq mi.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that expanding Cabrillo SMR would advance Network-level management.

During the MLPA Initiative planning process, Cabrillo SMR was deliberately designed to contribute to multiple objectives within MLPA Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Although the proposed expansion of Cabrillo SMR may appear to enhance existing ecological protections consistent with Goals 1, 2, and 4, there is not sufficient information to support that this proposed action would align with the petitioner's stated purpose, which is to protect persistent kelp patches and enhance the state's restoration potential for other kelp forests in decline. Extending the MPA boundary offshore to the 3 nm state boundary would unnecessarily include deeper habitat beyond where kelp can grow, as kelp only grows within the shallow photic zone. Available observations from the area around Cabrillo SMR indicate kelp does not occur within the proposed offshore expansion beyond approximately the 30-m (~98.5 ft) depth contour, located less than 1.5 miles (1.3

nm) from shore. As a result, the proposed expansion is not well aligned with its stated conservation purpose (MLPA 2009a).

Furthermore, potential ecological gains must be weighed against other MLPA Goals. The MPA Network was intentionally designed to balance conservation benefits with the needs of coastal communities and diverse ocean users, including fisheries (Goal 3). During the planning process, the site-specific rationale (Goal 5) resulted in Cabrillo SMR boundaries deliberately drawn to protect rocky intertidal and nearshore habitats, including kelp forests, while minimizing impacts on productive nearby and offshore fishing grounds. Based on fishery activity around the Cabrillo SMR since implementation, those same potential impacts remain relevant today (see response to Question 15 on impacts to consumptive users). These tradeoffs were a core component of the science-based, stakeholder-driven process that established, and continues to guide, management of California's MPA Network (Goal 6). Advancing major MPA boundary changes through isolated petitions is inconsistent with that approach.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding the SMR, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their region-wide decline since 2014 is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence within the petitioner's stated MPAs or proposed new MPA.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and

climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed northward and westward expansion of Cabrillo SMR does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMR is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed expansion overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 2 (open) and Bed 3 (leasable). Open kelp beds are available to commercial kelp harvest and leases cannot be issued. Commercial kelp can be harvested within leasable kelp beds until a lease is obtained for the bed, at which time the bed can only be harvested by the lease holder. Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in Bed 2 in 2022 and in Bed 3 in 2012.

The proposed change also has the potential to impact two existing Experimental Fishing Permits (EFPs): EFPT3-001 (swordfish/tuna) and EFPT4-001 (box crab/king crab).

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. The proposed expansion would extend into waters off Point Loma where the U.S. Navy conducts training, testing, research, and development activities for military readiness related to national defense. The Department of the Navy has previously stated their opposition to the proposed change, citing concerns that the expansion would create operational constraints to military readiness. The proposed change would require

additional discussions with the Navy pursuant to mandates in Fish & G. Code section 2863. The MPA is adjacent to the Cabrillo National Monument, which is federally administered by the National Park Service. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities.

The proposed SMR expansion has the potential to interact with the regulations and permitting activities of the Water Boards related to point source (e.g., wastewater treatment facilities) and non-point source discharges (e.g., stormwater runoff) into Marine Managed Areas. The State Water Board can designate SWQPAs to prevent the undesirable alteration of natural water quality within MPAs. The State Water Board's Water Quality Control Plan for Ocean Waters of California (California Ocean Plan) was amended in 2012 to include the process for designating SWQPAs and Implementation Provisions for Marine Managed Areas (Chapter III.E., State Water Board 2019). This was done with the intention to align these SWQPAs with the MPA Network. The provisions are implemented by the regional water boards, including through Waste Discharge requirements, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permits, and municipal separate storm sewer system permits. If the State Water Board designates the expanded area as part of the existing SWQPAs, this would have implications on the Water Boards' workload and for permittees that would need to come into compliance with new permit requirements. The scope and magnitude of the Water Boards' workload and the cost of compliance for permittees is unknown.

The City of San Diego's Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant operates just north of Cabrillo SMR's existing northern boundary. The facility's outfall pipe extends 4.5 miles (3.9 nm) offshore from the treatment plant and the terminal point would be outside of the proposed expanded SMR. However, the proposed expansion may affect the permitting and management activities of the Water Boards.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,

- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. Expanded boundaries for Cabrillo SMR were suggested by an external proposal in the first of three rounds of MPA array development during the MLPA Initiative planning process (MLPA 2009b) but not retained in subsequent rounds of proposals (MLPA 2009a).

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding a few select MPAs for kelp recovery or to enhance resilience is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant expanding Cabrillo SMR.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes and no. The original intent of the MPA was to protect nearshore ecosystems. The MPA was intentionally not extended to the 3 nm limit of state waters to avoid negative socioeconomic impacts. Therefore, the proposed alongshore extension of this MPA is in line with the original intent, while the offshore extension is not.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

Yes. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by

the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

Cabrillo SMR is 0.39 square miles with a Very High LOP and therefore meets the LOP, but not the size guideline (Table 1). Expanding the SMR as proposed would increase its area above the size threshold, allowing it to meet both criteria. The expanded MPA would be large enough to contribute to replication and representation of kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard bottom (0-30 m depth zone), and soft bottom (30-100 m depth zone) habitats. While each of these habitats is already sufficiently represented in the Network, their spacing is not always optimal. Therefore, increasing the SMR's area would strengthen its contribution to foundational Network ecological goals such as habitat spacing. In this respect, implementation of the proposed change would improve the design of the individual MPA and the MPA Network and enhance alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. The proposed change would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: boundaries are not described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude, and it is unclear if the landmarks suggested by the petitioner to identify the proposed boundaries are easily recognizable for both shore- and boat-based users. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

> ### **QUESTION 10B:** IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?
>
> **No**. There is no rationale for moving forward with the proposed change or an alternative that better aligns with the Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

No. The proposed northern boundary is not aligned with readily determinable lines of latitude and longitude. Additionally, it is unclear if the petitioner's suggested landmark to

identify the proposed boundary is easily recognizable for both shore- and boat-based users. This could complicate enforcement of the MPA.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed change would maintain or enhance protection of marine resources by significantly increasing the area of several habitats protected within the MPA, including kelp forests, in sufficient amounts to contribute towards habitat replication. However, it is uncertain whether this would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

The proposed boundary expansion would make several coastal access points and the Mission Bay Harbor closer to the boundaries of the MPA. Users who rely on these access points for consumptive activities would be displaced, and both recreational and commercial consumptive activities would likely experience adverse impacts. Most of the proposed expansion lies within a broadly high-value commercial fishing block. Specifically, this block has the highest lobster landings by value in San Diego County (Fig. 1). Significant impacts are expected for the commercial urchin and lobster fisheries, with additional negative effects likely for commercial highly migratory species fisheries and the commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) fleet operating in the area, especially

those conducting half-day trips. Extending the SMR past the rockfish conservation area 100-fathom line could also affect commercial nearshore groundfish fishing.

As stated above (see Question 7), this area was considered for inclusion in the MPA Network during the planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high importance to commercial and recreational fisheries. Those same considerations remain relevant and indicate that the proposed change would have substantial effects on existing consumptive uses of the area.

Expanding this already well-visited MPA may have beneficial impacts on non-consumptive activities. The increased proximity to multiple access points would allow continued (and potentially more convenient) access for non-consumptive activities. Regarding research and study opportunities, there are kelp and intertidal long-term monitoring sites within the proposed expanded boundaries, which may disrupt existing experimental designs.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response.

The proposed change would reduce access to local fishing grounds and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for small boat commercial fishery participants or CPFVs homeported in the coastal fishing community of San Diego (~6 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

No. There are no potential interactions or effects on any of the other 2023 MPA petitions.

2023-33MPA_2_AM1: Expand Point Dume SMCA westward by 4.6 sq mi and add allowance for recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and by spearfishing.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that modifying Point Dume SMCA, which was deliberately developed during the MLPA Initiative planning process to contribute to all six MLPA Goals, would advance Network-level management.

Point Dume SMCA was specifically designed to protect marine life populations and habitats (Goals 1-2). Monitoring results pooled across habitats from 2019-2020 show a significant positive MPA effect on fish biomass in the southern bioregion, indicating that MPAs are performing as hoped (Smith et al. 2025).

Point Dume SMCA also contributes to habitat replication goals developed during the planning process (Goal 4). Together with the adjacent Point Dume SMR, the SMCA protects multiple key habitats, including kelp, which is the overarching purpose of the petition. If the proposed expansion were implemented, it would not add sufficient area of any key habitats to meet additional replication goals. Furthermore, because the replication threshold is based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of the species diversity associated with each habitat, it is unclear what meaningful ecological benefit would be achieved by adding marginal area beyond what already meets established guidelines, especially while reducing the LOP with the proposed take allowance.

Remarkably, Point Dume SMCA contributes to these ecological goals and simultaneously supports recreational and study opportunities (Goal 3), minimizes negative socioeconomic impacts while enhancing positive ones for all users (Goal 5), and reflects the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven planning process that underpins the statewide Network (Goal 6). This deliberate balance signifies the carefully considered tradeoffs made during the MLPA Initiative planning process.

The petitioner's proposal would compromise this balance. Allowing additional take would lower the SMCA's LOP to Moderate-low, which is incompatible with achieving Goals 1 and 2. Expanding boundaries without strong scientific justification does not advance Goal 4, and introduces new conflicts with Goals 3, 5, and 6 by discounting original planning process decisions, imposing socioeconomic impacts without clear ecological benefit, and relying on inconclusive evidence that additional protected area will deliver the kelp-related benefits anticipated by the petitioner.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion and added take allowance would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding the SMCA, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger,

older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed westward expansion and additional take allowance for Point Dume SMCA do not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMCA is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed MPA overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 17, which is leasable. Commercial kelp can be harvested within leasable kelp beds until a lease is obtained for the bed, at which time the bed can only be harvested by the lease holder. Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in this bed in 2015.

The proposed change also has the potential to impact two existing EFPs: EFPT3-001 (swordfish/tuna) and EFPT4-001 (box crab/king crab), particularly the former. Point Dume is listed as one of five authorized fishing areas in the EFP terms and conditions for EFPT3-001 (swordfish/tuna) and the expansion would eliminate roughly 75% of the EFP's fishable area around Point Dume.

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. The proposed change expands an existing overlap with an Area of Special Biological Significance (ASBS). It is unclear whether the proposed change would affect the management activities of the State or Regional Water Quality Control Boards

The MPA is adjacent to Robert H. Meyer State Beach. Implementation of the proposed expansion may interact with the management activities of the Department of Parks and Recreation and would require coordination on enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. A slightly expanded western boundary (118° 53.500′ W) was considered in proposals 2 and 3 in the third and final round of MPA array development in the South Coast Planning Region (MLPA 2009b). The boundary included in Proposal 1 (118° 53.000′ W) was ultimately adopted.

Recreational shorefishing for unspecified species was not considered. All three Round 3 proposals allowed take of pelagic finfish, Pacific bonito, and white seabass by spearfishing, which was ultimately adopted in the regulations. Proposals 2 and 3 also proposed to allow take of coastal pelagic finfish and market squid by dip net, and Proposal 3 also included an allowance for the take of jumbo squid by hook-and-line (MLPA 2009b). These take regulations were deliberately developed to allow some fishing activities while maintaining the High LOP backbone cluster at Point Dume. As stated in the considerations for Proposal 1 regarding the proposed recreational and commercial take regulations, "[w]e allowed for squid and coastal pelagic species seining, spearfishing for pelagics, and harpooning for swordfish [all High LOP activities] to generate cross interest support from conservation and consumptive communities." The proposed take regulations in this petition would reduce the LOP to Moderate-low, such that the Point Dume cluster would no longer contribute to Network-scale replication and representation goals. This is not aligned with the original intent developed during the planning process.

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant the proposed changes.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

No. While the proposed expansion does encompass more of the habitats that the MPA is intended to protect, it does not align with the original intent of the shape or take regulations implemented, which aimed to minimize, to the extent possible, fisheries impacts while maintaining a High LOP. Therefore, the proposed expansion conflicts with deliberate decisions made during the MLPA Initiative planning process to optimize multiple, sometimes competing, priorities.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

No. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest levels of protection (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

Point Dume SMCA, together with neighboring Point Dume SMR, currently meets both minimum criteria and thus contributes to foundational ecological Network objectives (Table 2). The proposed expansion would increase the area protected within the MPA of several already replicated key habitats, namely kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, and soft bottom (0-30, 30-100, 100-200, and >200 m depth zones) habitats, which would improve the design of this MPA. However, because the MPA already meets the size thresholds for these habitats, the extent to which this additional habitat area would provide further ecological benefit is uncertain. The expansion would also increase the area of hard bottom habitat in the 0-30 and 30-100 m depth zones, but not enough to meet the minimum thresholds required of these habitats to contribute to habitat replication or representation. Furthermore, any benefit of increased size would be negated by the proposed take allowance. The additional take allowance proposed by the petitioner would reduce the LOP of Point Dume SMCA from High to Moderate-low, meaning it would no longer contribute to Network-scale habitat goals. Since Point Dume SMR does not meet the minimum size criterion on its own, implementation of the proposed change in take regulations would remove the entire Point Dume cluster from habitat replication and representation analyses, leaving a major connectivity gap in a key stretch of the coast.

Since the increase in size would not advance additional Network-scale ecological objectives and the proposed take allowance would invalidate this MPA's contribution to such objectives by decreasing the LOP of the SMCA, implementation of the proposed change would not improve the design of the individual MPA or of the Network and would decrease alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. The proposed change would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: boundaries are not described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude, and it is unclear if the landmarks suggested by the petitioner to identify the proposed boundaries are easily recognizable for both shore- and boat-based users. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 10B: IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. There is no rationale for moving forward with the proposed change or an alternative that better aligns with the Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

No. The western boundary is not aligned with lines of latitude and longitude or easily recognizable permanent landmarks, which could complicate enforcement. Moreover, the proposed change adds an additional take allowance which compromises enforceability by:

- Making it more difficult to discern if an activity is allowed when surveilling the MPA from afar,
- Increasing the potential for non-compliance with members of the public who observe the activity taking place in an MPA but are unfamiliar with the regulations, and
- Increasing the potential for the illegal take of other species.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

No. The proposed change does not enhance protection of marine resources because it would introduce another type of take (recreational hook-and-line fishing from shore) that decreases protection for nearshore fish species that are currently protected under the existing regulations. Although implementation of the proposed change would increase the area contained within the MPA of multiple habitats, including sandy beach,

rocky intertidal, kelp forests, and soft bottom habitats (Table 2), sufficient area is already protected in the existing MPA of some of these habitats to contribute towards habitat replication. Of the remaining habitats, not enough area is added through the proposed expansion to meet the requirement to count towards replication goals. Furthermore, the Point Dume SMCA and neighboring Point Dume SMR act together as an MPA cluster which was intentionally designed to maintain some critical fisheries allowances in the area while meeting the design criteria necessary to contribute to MPA Network ecological objectives in a key section of coastline. Adding the proposed take allowance would lower the SMCA's LOP from High to Moderate-low. As a result, both the SMCA and SMR would no longer serve as a critical ecological replicate in the Network, creating a considerable connectivity gap in this stretch of coastline. This would substantially compromise the design of the MPA cluster and the Network as a whole and may alter connectivity dynamics between this area and surrounding MPAs. Lastly, although the petitioner's intent is to increase protections for kelp forest habitat within MPAs, it is uncertain whether the proposed expansion would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

Both recreational and commercial consumptive activities would likely experience adverse impacts. Although recreational take of white seabass and pelagic finfish by spearfishing is allowed, expansion of the SMCA would limit other types of fishing and could have significant impacts on local recreational fishing opportunities and private boat fishermen. Most of the proposed expansion lies within a high-value commercial fishing block (681). In particular, there is potential for negative impacts to the commercial swordfish fishery and the CPFV fleet, especially out of Channel Islands and Ventura Harbors.

As stated above (see Question 7), this area was considered for inclusion in the MPA Network during the planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high importance to commercial and recreational fisheries. Those same considerations remain relevant and indicate that the proposed change would have substantial effects on existing consumptive uses of the area.

Expanding this MPA could benefit non-consumptive users by bringing two additional coastal access points within the boundaries of the MPA. In addition, the expansion would place the MPA adjacent to all three pocket beaches comprising Robert H. Meyer Memorial State Beach (as opposed to only one currently). Regarding research and study opportunities, there do not appear to be any long-term monitoring sites within the boundaries of the proposed expansion.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response.

The proposed change would add a new recreational take opportunity within the existing MPA footprint. However, the expansion of the MPA would decrease take opportunities in the newly protected areas. This action is particularly relevant for the coastal fishing communities of:

- Ventura Harbor (~40 nm away from area of proposed change), and
- Channel Islands Harbor (Oxnard, ~38 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

Yes. This petition has the potential to interact with Petition 2023-14MPA, where the petitioner is proposing to allow commercial urchin take in nine MPAs, including Point Dume SMCA. These petitions may be in conflict, since the present petitioner aims to enhance ecological protections and adding an allowance for urchin take would further reduce the MPA's LOP.

2023-33MPA_3: Expand South Point SMR westward by 26.3 sq mi.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that expanding South Point SMR would advance Network-level management.

South Point SMR was established in 2003 as part of the Channel Islands MPA planning process. The Marine Reserves Working Group (MRWG) collaboratively designed a network of No-take reserves intended to conserve biodiversity, sustain fisheries, support education and research, and preserve natural and cultural heritage, while minimizing negative socioeconomic impacts (CINMS 2002). These goals, which clearly align with the six MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives, informed the SMR's final design.

South Point SMR was specifically designed to protect marine life populations and habitats (Goals 1-2). Monitoring results from the Channel Islands show that both abundance and biomass of targeted species are greater within reserves compared to reference areas outside MPA boundaries (Caselle et al. 2015), indicating that MPAs are performing as intended towards achievement of ecological goals.

South Point SMR also contributes to habitat replication goals developed during the planning process (Goal 4). The MRWG explicitly aimed to conserve marine biodiversity and habitats in a reserve network at a minimum cost in terms of area, boundary length, and economic impacts. The SMR protects multiple key habitats, including kelp forests, which is the overarching purpose of the petition. The proposed expansion would not

enable the MPA to meet replication goals for any additional key habitats. Because replication thresholds are based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of species diversity associated with a particular habitat, adding a small amount of additional area beyond what already meets established guidelines is likely to yield only nominal ecological benefit while potentially imposing disproportionate impacts on other users. Therefore, the proposed expansion introduces socioeconomic impacts without evidence of ecological benefit and undermines the tradeoffs established during the planning process.

This relates directly to Goals 3, 5, and 6. The existing South Point SMR was designed not only to meet ecological goals but also to support recreational and study opportunities (Goal 3), minimize negative socioeconomic impacts while enhancing positive ones for all users (Goal 5), and reflect the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven planning process that underpins the statewide Network (Goal 6). This balance signifies the carefully considered tradeoffs made during the Channel Islands MPA planning process. At that time, there was a request to consider extending the South Point SMR west to Bee Rock, as is proposed in this petition. CDFW and NOAA jointly determined that doing so "was not possible…without greatly increasing the economic impact to lobster and urchin fisheries," and the recommendation went unheeded. The considerations informing that decision remain relevant today.

The proposed expansion would compromise the balance achieved during the planning process. Expanding boundaries without clear scientific justification does not advance Goals 1, 2, or 4, and introduces new conflicts with Goals 3, 5, and 6 by discounting prior planning decisions, imposing socioeconomic impacts, and relying on inconclusive evidence that additional protected area will deliver the kelp-related benefits anticipated by the petitioner.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding South Point SMR, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed westward expansion of South Point SMR does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMR is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed South Point SMR expansion overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 114, which is open. Open kelp beds are available to commercial kelp harvest and leases cannot be issued. Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in this bed in 2005.

The proposed change also has the potential to impact two existing EFPs: EFPT3-001 (swordfish/tuna) and EFPT4-001 (box crab/king crab).

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. South Point SMR is inside the CINMS and the Channel Islands National Park, which are federally administered by NOAA and the National Park Service, respectively. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities. CDFW would need to work with NOAA on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts. Note that the expansion would modify the state SMR so it would no longer align with the South Point Federal Marine Reserve.

South Point SMR overlaps with an ASBS that circumnavigates the Northern Channel Islands, and the proposed change would further overlap with this ASBS. It is unclear whether the proposed change would affect the management activities of the State or Regional Water Quality Control Boards.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,

- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. During the Channel Islands MPA planning process, stakeholder feedback on the working draft jointly developed by CDFW and NOAA following conclusion of the Channel Islands MRWG advised extending the South Point SMR to the west towards Bee Rock/Cluster Point to capture more kelp forest (CIMNS 2002). The agencies determined that it was not possible to increase the representation of kelp forests without greatly increasing the economic impact to the lobster and urchin fisheries, and the expanded boundary was not considered further.

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent

or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to the proposed expansion of South Point SMR.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

No. While the proposed expansion of South Point SMR does encompass larger areas of the habitats that the MPA is intended to protect, it does not align with the original intent of the shape implemented, which aimed to minimize impacts to fisheries. Therefore, the expansion conflicts with deliberate decisions made during the Channel Islands MPA planning process to optimize multiple, sometimes competing, priorities. See Response to Question 7.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

No. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest

LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

South Point SMR currently meets both minimum criteria and thus contributes to foundational ecological Network objectives (Table 3). The proposed change would increase the area protected within the MPA of several already replicated key habitats, namely kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard bottom (0-30 and 30-100 m depth zones), and soft bottom (0-30, 30-100, 100-200, and >200 m depth zones) habitats, which would improve the design of this MPA. However, because the MPA already meets the area thresholds for these habitats, the extent to which this additional habitat area would provide further ecological benefit is uncertain.

The expansion would also increase the area of hard bottom habitat in the 100-200 m depth zone, but not enough to meet the minimum threshold required of this habitat to contribute to habitat replication or representation. Since the increase in size would not advance additional MPA Network-scale ecological objectives, implementation of the proposed expansion of South Point SMR would not improve the design of the MPA Network or enhance alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

Yes. The proposed change aligns with CDFW Feasibility Guidelines, as does the existing design. There was not sufficient information provided in the petition that outweighs the original decisions in the Channel Islands MPA or MLPA Initiative planning processes to justify moving forward with the proposed change. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

> **QUESTION 10B:** IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?
>
> **Not applicable.**

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

Yes and No. The proposed change maintains enforceability of MPA regulations by aligning the proposed western boundary with a recognizable landmark, although it does not align with a readily determinable line of latitude and longitude. While whole lines of latitude and longitude are preferred for demarcating boundaries, aligning with a recognizable landmark is still consistent with CDFW Feasibility Guidelines for MPA design.

However, the expansion would change the state South Point SMR boundary so it would no longer align with the South Point Federal Marine Reserve. Boundary misalignment could introduce a new enforcement challenge.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed expansion of South Point SMR would protect an additional distance of 8.18 linear miles of kelp, 5.04 linear miles of beach, and 6.79 linear miles of rocky intertidal, as well as additional area of hard and soft bottom habitats at a range of depths (Table 3). This has the potential to provide local protection for habitats and species within the newly expanded area. However, the MPA was designed to protect sufficient area of these habitats such that the MPA already contributes towards replication for all but one of these habitats. For the remaining habitat that is not currently a replicate (hard substrate, 100-200 m depth), the proposed expansion still would not include enough area to meet the requirement to count towards replication goals.

Furthermore, although the petitioner's intent is to increase protections for kelp forest habitat within MPAs, it is uncertain whether the proposed expansion would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of South Point SMR for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

Expanding the South Point SMR could negatively impact consumptive uses, with significant impacts expected for the commercial lobster, urchin, and nearshore

groundfish fisheries, the CPFV fleet operating out of Santa Barbara, and private boaters fishing for white seabass and halibut. During the Channel Islands MPA planning process, expanded boundaries to encompass more kelp forest within South Point SMR was noted as a priority change for the working draft. However, the area west towards Bee Rock/Cluster Point was deliberately not added due to concerns of significantly increased economic impacts to certain fisheries, which remains relevant today. The petition did not discuss economic impacts to the fisheries.

Regarding non-consumptive users, the proposed expansion has the potential to impact researchers and long-term monitoring sites for several core habitats. There are intertidal, kelp, and deep reef long-term monitoring sites that would fall within the boundaries of the proposed expansion. The proposed South Point SMR expansion would subsume current non-MPA reference sites within the SMR's No-take boundaries, impacting the experimental design for these MPA monitoring groups and their long-term studies.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response.

The proposed change would reduce fishing access and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for fishing participants associated with the coastal fishing communities of:

- Channel Islands Harbor (Oxnard),
- Ventura, and
- Santa Barbara.

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

No. There are no potential interactions or effects on any of the other 2023 MPA petitions.

2023-33MPA_4: Expand Gull Island SMR northward by 1.8 sq mi.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that expanding Gull Island SMR would advance Network-level management.

Gull Island SMR was established in 2003 as part of the Channel Islands MPA implementation process. The MRWG collaboratively designed a network of No-take reserves intended to conserve biodiversity, sustain fisheries, support education and research, and preserve natural and cultural heritage, while minimizing negative socioeconomic impacts. These goals, which clearly align with the six MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives, informed the SMR's final design.

Gull Island SMR was specifically designed to protect marine life populations and habitats (Goals 1-2). Monitoring results from the Channel Islands show that both abundance and biomass of targeted species are greater within reserves compared to reference areas outside MPA boundaries (Caselle et al. 2015), indicating that MPAs are performing as intended towards achievement of ecological goals.

Gull Island SMR also contributes to habitat replication goals developed during the planning process (Goal 4). The MRWG explicitly aimed to conserve marine biodiversity and habitats in a reserve network at a minimum cost in terms of area, boundary length, and economic impacts. The SMR protects multiple key habitats, including kelp, which is the overarching purpose of the petition. The proposed expansion would not enable the

MPA to meet replication goals for any additional key habitats. Because replication thresholds are based on protecting sufficient area to encompass 90% of species diversity associated with a particular habitat, adding a small amount of additional area beyond what already meets established guidelines is likely to yield only nominal ecological benefit while potentially imposing disproportionate impacts on consumptive users. Therefore, the proposed expansion introduces socioeconomic impacts without evidence of ecological benefit and undermines the balance established during the planning process.

This relates directly to Goals 3, 5, and 6. The existing Gull Island SMR was designed not only to meet ecological goals but also to support recreational and study opportunities (Goal 3), minimize negative socioeconomic impacts while enhancing positive ones for all users (Goal 5), and reflect the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven planning process that underpins the statewide Network (Goal 6). This balance reflects the carefully considered tradeoffs made during the Channel Islands MPA planning process. At that time, the area this petition proposes to expand into was included in the initial working draft version of Gull Island SMR. Recreational fishing participants requested that Posa Anchorage be opened. Recognizing the significant impacts to recreational and commercial fishing of closing the anchorage, the area was removed from the working draft. The considerations informing that decision remain relevant today.

The proposed expansion of Gull Island SMR would compromise the balance achieved during the planning process. Expanding boundaries without clear scientific justification does not advance Goals 1, 2, or 4, and introduces new conflicts with Goals 3, 5, and 6 by discounting prior planning decisions, imposing socioeconomic impacts, and relying on inconclusive evidence that additional protected area will deliver the kelp-related benefits anticipated by the petitioner.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding Gull Island SMR, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding this MPA's boundary, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed northward expansion of Gull Island SMR does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMR is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed Gull Island SMR expansion overlaps significantly with Administrative Kelp Bed 111, which is leasable. Commercial kelp can be harvested within leasable kelp

beds until a lease is obtained for the bed, at which time the bed can only be harvested by the lease holder.

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. Gull Island SMR is inside the CINMS and the Channel Islands National Park, which are federally administered by NOAA and the National Park Service, respectively. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities. CDFW would need to work with NOAA on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts. Note that the expansion does not affect alignment with the Gull Island Federal Marine Reserve, as the expansion extends onshore towards Santa Cruz Island, entirely in state waters.

Gull Island SMR overlaps with an ASBS that circumnavigates the Northern Channel Islands, and the proposed change would further overlap with this ASBS. It is unclear whether the proposed change would affect the management activities of the State or Regional Water Quality Control Boards.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. The Channel Islands MRWG proposed two configurations of the MPA boundaries for Gull Island SMR, one of which did not include Posa Anchorage, and one that extended onshore to Santa Cruz Island and included the proposed expansion area. After the work of the MRWG concluded, the Channel Islands Sanctuary Advisory Council advised CDFW and NOAA to jointly finish the work of the MRWG and develop a recommendation to provide to the CFGC. Both options proposed by the MRWG were considered by CDFW and NOAA, and the latter was included in the working draft that was sent to the MRWG and local fishing and environmental groups for input prior to submission to CFGC. CDFW and NOAA's recommendation aimed to reflect the progress made during the MRWG process as well as state and federal legislation, regulations, and jurisdictions in place at the time (CINMS 2002). The constituencies that reviewed the recommendations provided CDFW and NOAA with a list of their top priorities to incorporate into the MPA configurations for CFGC's consideration. One of the top priority changes expressed by the recreational fishing community was exclusion of the area that included Posa Anchorage from the Gull

Island SMR. In response, Posa Anchorage was removed from the working draft to allow recreational and commercial fishing to continue (CINMS 2002).

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant revisiting this decision.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

No. The proposed change does not align with the original intent of the MPA identified during the Channel Islands MPA planning process. The area within the proposed expansion was initially considered and then removed to allow recreational and commercial fishing following feedback on the working draft from consumptive users. Therefore, the expansion conflicts with deliberate decisions made during the Channel Islands MPA planning process to optimize multiple, sometimes competing, priorities.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

No. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

Gull Island SMR currently meets both minimum criteria and thus contributes to foundational ecological Network objectives, including replication and representation of kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard bottom (0-30, 100-200, and >200 m depth zones), and soft bottom (0-30, 30-100, 100-200, and >200 m depth zones) habitats (Table 4).

Shifting the SMR boundary north would add additional area to the SMR of many of these already replicated habitats. While this may improve the design of the individual MPA, it would not advance additional Network-scale ecological objectives beyond what is currently provided. Therefore, implementation of the proposed change would not improve the design of the MPA Network or enhance alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

Yes. The proposed change may better align with CDFW Feasibility Guidelines by aligning the complete shoreward boundary of the MPA with the island's coastline. However, there was not sufficient information provided in the petition that outweighs the original decisions in the Channel Islands MPA or MLPA Initiative planning processes to justify moving forward with the proposed change. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

> ### **QUESTION 10B:** IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?
>
> **Not Applicable.**

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

Yes. The proposed change maintains (and may enhance) enforceability of MPA regulations by aligning the proposed expansion with an existing boundary line, which is consistent with CDFW Feasibility Guidelines for MPA design. Over time, following significant outreach and engagement regarding the proposed change, enforceability may even be enhanced by removing the existing hanging corner in this MPA's design. However, it is important to note that the existing boundaries comply with Feasibility Guidelines by aligning with whole minutes of latitude and longitude, and enforcement concerns have not been highlighted for this MPA.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed expansion would protect an additional distance of 2.59 linear miles of kelp, 2.41 linear miles of beach, and 1.72 linear miles of rocky intertidal, as well as additional area of hard and soft bottom habitats at a range of depths (Table 4). This has the potential to provide local protection for habitats and species within the newly expanded area. However, the MPA was designed to protect sufficient area of these habitats such that the MPA already contributes to replication for each of these key habitats.

Furthermore, although the petitioner's intent is to increase protections for kelp forest habitat within MPAs, it is uncertain whether the proposed expansion would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

Expanding the SMR could negatively impact consumptive uses, with significant impacts expected for the commercial lobster fishery. This area is also particularly important for the commercial squid fleet (Fig. 2), CPFVs operating out of Santa Barbara, Channel Islands, and Ventura Harbors, and both recreational and commercial highly migratory species fishing. The gillnet fleet may also be adversely impacted.

As stated above (see Question 7), this area was considered for inclusion during the Channel Islands MPA planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high value to the commercial squid fleet and the request to maintain access to Posa Anchorage.

This MPA is not easily accessible to the public, and the proposed expansion would not readily increase accessibility for non-consumptive users. Regarding research and study opportunities, there do not appear to be any long-term monitoring sites within the boundaries of the proposed expansion.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response.

The proposed change would reduce fishing access and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for fishing participants associated with the coastal fishing community of Santa Barbara (~29 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

Yes. This petition has the potential to interact with Petition 2023-15MPA, where the petitioner is proposing to reclassify Gull Island SMR as an SMCA to modify take regulations. These petitions may be in conflict, since the present petitioner aims to enhance ecological protections and redesignation to an SMCA would reduce protection.

2023-33MPA_5: Expand Point Conception SMR eastward by 14.6 sq mi.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that expanding Point Conception SMR, which was deliberately developed during the MLPA Initiative planning process to contribute to all six MLPA Goals, would advance Network-level management.

Point Conception SMR was specifically designed to protect marine life populations and habitats (Goals 1-2). Monitoring results pooled across habitats from 2019-2020 show a significant positive MPA effect on fish biomass in the southern bioregion, indicating that MPAs are performing as expected (Smith et al. 2025).

Point Conception SMR also contributes to habitat replication goals developed during the planning process (Goal 4). The SMR protects multiple key habitats, including kelp, which is the overarching purpose of the petition. The proposed expansion would enable the MPA to meet replication goals for only one additional key habitat (hard substrate, 0-30 m depth). The MPA already protects the amount of area necessary to encompass 90% of the associated species diversity in seven other key habitats. Therefore, protecting additional hard substrate may yield only nominal ecological benefit while potentially imposing disproportionate impacts on other users. Therefore, the proposed expansion introduces socioeconomic impacts without evidence of ecological benefit and undermines the balance established during the planning process.

This relates directly to Goals 3, 5, and 6. The existing Point Conception SMR was designed not only to meet ecological goals but also to enhance cultural, recreational, and educational uses (Goal 3), minimizes negative socioeconomic impacts while optimizing positive ones for all users (Goal 5), and reflects the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven planning process that underpins the statewide Network (Goal 6). This deliberate balance reflects the carefully considered tradeoffs made during the MLPA Initiative planning process.

The proposed expansion would compromise this balance. Expanding boundaries without clear scientific justification does not advance Goals 1, 2, or 4, and introduces new conflicts with Goals 3, 5, and 6 by discounting prior planning decisions, imposing socioeconomic impacts, and relying on inconclusive evidence that the additional protected area will deliver the kelp-related benefits anticipated by the petitioner.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding the SMR, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to

disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed eastward expansion of Point Conception SMR does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMR is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed expansion of this MPA overlaps significantly with Administrative Kelp Bed 32, which is leasable. Commercial kelp can be harvested within leasable kelp beds until a lease is obtained for the bed, at which time the bed can only be harvested by the lease holder. Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in this bed in 2019. CFGC approved a kelp harvest plan to mechanically harvest kelp in this bed, but implementation of the proposed expansion would encompass almost the entire bed, effectively rendering it no take.

The proposed change also has the potential to impact four existing EFPs: EFPT2-001 (Dungeness crab/hagfish/rock crab), EFPT2-002 Dungeness crab/rock crab (spot prawn), EFPT2-004 (Dungeness crab), EFPT4-001 (box crab/king crab).

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. The MPA is inside the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, which is federally administered by NOAA and co-managed with tribes. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal and tribal authorities and may interact with their management activities. CDFW would need to work

with NOAA and tribes on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. Expanded eastward boundaries were considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process, but none included an eastern boundary extending as far east as the current proposal (MLPA 2009b), and were deliberately not retained by the BRTF and CFGC. A proposal with an eastern boundary aligned with 120 25' W, was ultimately chosen to balance conservation and consumptive priorities.

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South oast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant revisiting this decision.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. The proposed change aligns with the original intent of the MPA identified during the MLPA Initiative planning process, in that it would increase the amount protected of several key habitats, such as kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, and both soft and hard bottom habitat at a range of depths (Table 5). However, the MPA was deliberately designed during the planning process to encompass sufficient area of these key habitats to meet habitat replication goals. Therefore, the proposed expansion would not advance these goals beyond what the existing design already achieves. The proposed expansion would add sufficient area of nearshore hard bottom habitat to contribute to replication of this habitat, but this is incidental to the stated objectives of the petition. Furthermore, the expansion conflicts with compromises made during the MLPA Initiative planning process to optimize multiple, sometimes competing, priorities.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

Yes. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

Point Conception SMR currently meets both minimum criteria and thus contributes to foundational ecological Network objectives, including replication and representation of kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard bottom (30-100 m depth zone), and soft bottom (0-30, 30-100, and 100-200 m depth zones) habitats (Table 5). Shifting the SMR boundary east as proposed would increase the area of these habitats within the MPA, which would improve the design of the individual MPA. However, because the MPA already meets the area thresholds for these habitats, the extent to which this additional habitat area would provide further ecological benefit is uncertain.

The expansion would also add enough nearshore hard bottom habitat to the SMR to meet the minimum area threshold for this habitat type, thereby enabling it to contribute

to replication goals for an additional key habitat. Although current spacing (approximately 31 miles) is already within the recommended maximum distance of 62 miles, the expansion would further reduce spacing between replicates of this habitat type. In this respect, the proposed change would improve MPA Network design and enhance alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. The proposed change would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: the proposed boundary is not described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude or easily recognizable permanent landmarks. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 10B: IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. There is no rationale for moving forward with the proposed change or an alternative that better aligns with the Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

No. The proposed eastern boundary is not aligned with readily determinable lines of latitude and longitude or easily recognizable permanent landmarks, which could complicate enforcement of this MPA.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed expansion would protect an additional distance of 4.20 linear miles of kelp, 3.61 linear miles of beach, and 2.75 linear miles of rocky intertidal, as well as additional area of hard and soft bottom habitats at a range of depths (Table 5). This has the potential to provide local protection for habitats and species within the newly expanded area. However, the MPA as designed already protects sufficient area to contribute towards replication of all but one of these habitats (i.e., nearshore hard substrate).

The proposed expansion would add sufficient nearshore hard bottom habitat for the MPA to meet replication criteria for this habitat, which is important for kelp. However, this MPA already encompasses sufficient kelp to contribute to replication objectives. Furthermore, the petition does not improve MPA Network design related to nearshore bottom habitat, nor is improving replication of this habitat a stated objective of the petition. As such, the additional habitat protection would not meaningfully improve the design of the MPA or the MPA Network, or advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR.

Furthermore, although the petitioner's intent is to increase protections for kelp forest habitat within MPAs, it is uncertain whether the proposed expansion would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

Expanding the SMR could negatively impact consumptive uses, with particularly significant impacts to the squid fleet (Fig. 2). The expansion also has the potential to adversely impact commercial fishing for nearshore groundfish.

As stated above (see Question 7), this area was considered for inclusion in the MPA Network during the planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high importance to commercial and recreational fisheries. Those same considerations remain relevant and indicate that the proposed change would have substantial effects on existing consumptive uses of the area.

This MPA is not readily accessible to the public. The proposed expansion does not add any nearby coastal access points but does place the eastern boundary approximately four miles closer to the nearest boat launches in Gaviota State Park and Goleta Beach County Park and the nearest harbor in Santa Barbara. This could benefit non-consumptive users. Regarding research and study opportunities, there are long-term

monitoring sites within the boundaries of the proposed expansion (e.g., shallow and deep rocky reef habitats). The proposed SMR expansion would subsume current non-MPA reference sites within the SMR's No-take boundaries, impacting the experimental design for these MPA monitoring groups and their long-term studies.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response.

The proposed change would reduce fishing access and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for fishing participants associated with the coastal fishing community of Santa Barbara (~45 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

No. There are no potential interactions or effects on any of the other 2023 MPA petitions.

2023-33MPA_6_AM1: Expand Natural Bridges SMR southward and eastward to the edge of Natural Bridges State Beach by ~14.5 sq mi.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that expanding Natural Bridges SMR would advance Network-level management.

Natural Bridges SMR was deliberately designed during the MLPA Initiative planning process to contribute to Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4. Although the proposed expansion of Natural Bridges SMR appears to enhance existing ecological protections consistent with Goals 1, 2, and 4, this proposed action is not consistent with the petitioner's stated purpose, which is to protect persistent kelp patches. Extending the MPA boundary out to the 3 nm limit is not necessary to achieve this, as kelp only grows within the shallow photic zone. Available observations from the area around Natural Bridges SMR indicate kelp does not occur within the proposed offshore addition beyond approximately 0.4 miles (0.35 nm) from shore. As a result, the proposed expansion is not well aligned with its stated conservation purpose.

Furthermore, potential ecological gains must be weighed against other MLPA Goals. The MPA Network was intentionally designed to balance conservation benefits with the needs of coastal communities and diverse ocean users, including fisheries (Goal 3). During the planning process, the site-specific rationale (Goal 5) resulted in Natural Bridges SMR boundaries deliberately drawn to protect rocky intertidal and nearshore habitats, including kelp forest, while minimizing impacts on productive nearby and offshore fishing grounds. These tradeoffs were a core component of the science-based, stakeholder-driven process that established, and continues to guide, management of California's MPA Network (Goal 6). Advancing major MPA boundary changes through isolated petitions is inconsistent with that approach.

Therefore, while the petitioner asserts alignment with MLPA Goals, the proposed expansion would not clearly advance MPA management or performance objectives, and in some cases, may even undermine them.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for expanding the SMR, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing a substantial boundary expansion without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed southward and eastward expansion of Natural Bridges SMR does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that expanding the SMR is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide the comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed MPA significantly overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 222, which is open. Open kelp beds are available to commercial kelp harvest and leases cannot be

issued. Implementation of the proposed expansion would encompass almost the entire bed, effectively rendering it no take. Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in this bed in 2019. Additional seasonal restrictions are set by Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS).

The proposed change also has the potential to impact four existing EFPs: EFPT2-001 (Dungeness crab/hagfish/rock crab), EFPT2-002 Dungeness crab/rock crab (spot prawn), EFPT2-004 (Dungeness crab), and EFPT4-001 (box crab/king crab).

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. The MPA is inside the MBNMS, which is federally administered by NOAA. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities. CDFW would need to work with NOAA on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

There are active leases authorized by the State Lands Commission within the proposed boundaries that may be affected by the proposed change. It is unclear whether the proposed change would have direct effects on the State Lands Commission's management activities.

The MPA is adjacent to Natural Bridges State Beach. If the proposed change was implemented, CDFW would need to work with the Department of Parks and Recreation on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,

- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. Other configurations for Natural Bridges SMR were initially considered in the Natural Bridges area in early phases of planning and design in the Central Coast region. Several of the proposals included an intertidal SMR similar to what was ultimately implemented. One proposal included a small nearshore SMR surrounded by a large SMCA. An additional proposal included an SMR slightly north towards Davenport that extended to the 3 nm limit of state waters. Subsequent rounds of proposals included only configurations that protected the intertidal zone (MLPA 2006). An SMR that extended to

greater depths near Santa Cruz Harbor was explicitly excluded to avoid negative socioeconomic impacts to those fishing in deeper offshore waters.

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant revisiting this decision.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

No. The proposed change does not align with the original intent of the MPA identified during the MLPA Initiative planning process. The SMR was designed specifically to protect intertidal and nearshore habitat while minimizing impacts to consumptive activities near Santa Cruz harbor (MLPA 2006). The proposed boundaries extend far beyond the habitats the MPA was specifically designed to protect and would likely produce significant negative socioeconomic impacts. This conflicts with deliberate decisions

made during the MLPA Initiative planning process to optimize multiple, sometimes competing, priorities.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

Yes. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

Natural Bridges SMR is 0.25 square miles with a Very High LOP and therefore meets the LOP, but not the size, guideline (Table 6). Expanding the SMR as proposed would increase its area above the size threshold, allowing it to meet both criteria. The expanded MPA would be large enough to contribute to replication and representation of kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard bottom (0-30 m depth zone), and soft bottom (0-30 and 30-100 m depth zone) habitats. Additionally, spacing would be reduced between replicates of each of these habitats. This is most notable for soft bottom habitats in the 30-100 m depth zone, for which the distance between the nearest existing replicates currently exceeds the recommended maximum of 62 miles. This spacing guideline would be met if the SMR were expanded. Therefore, increasing the SMR's area would strengthen its contribution to foundational Network ecological goals and enhance alignment with Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. The proposed change would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: extending the MPA to the 3 nm state water limit results in a hanging corner due to the delineation of state waters offshore Monterey Bay. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 10B: IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. There is no rationale for moving forward with the proposed change or an alternative that better aligns with the Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

No. The southward expansion offshore compromises enforceability. While offshore boundaries should extend from the shoreline to the 3 nm state water limit, as recommended by CDFW Feasibility Guidelines, doing so for this MPA creates a hanging corner that may create compliance and enforcement challenges.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. The proposed change does not simplify regulatory language.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed change would maintain or enhance protection of marine resources by significantly increasing the area of several habitats protected within the MPA, including kelp forest, in sufficient amounts to contribute towards habitat replication. However, it is uncertain whether this would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the expansion of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

The MPA is easily accessible for both shore- and boat-based users through numerous coastal access points and the nearby Santa Cruz Harbor. Users who rely on these access points for consumptive activities would be displaced, and both recreational and commercial consumptive activities would likely experience adverse impacts. The proposed expansion lies within a broadly high-value commercial fishing block. Significant impacts to the commercial market squid fishery in particular, are expected. The area also contains highly valuable squid spawning grounds, and in 2021, the value from this single commercial fishing block was $1.3 million (Fig. 3). Impacts to the commercial nearshore groundfish fishery are also likely.

As stated above (see Question 7), this area was considered for inclusion in the MPA Network during the planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high importance to commercial and recreational fisheries. Those same considerations remain relevant and indicate that the proposed change would have substantial effects on existing consumptive activities in the area.

Expanding this already well-visited MPA may have beneficial impacts on non-consumptive activities. Easy accessibility to this MPA, coupled with the expansion adjacent to Natural Bridges State Park, would allow continued access for non-consumptive uses. Regarding research and study opportunities, this area is frequently accessed by researchers due to the proximity to marine science campus at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Existing scientific collecting permits and research may be impacted by the restrictions associated with SMR designation. There are no long-term monitoring sites within the boundaries of the proposed expansion.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response. The change would reduce fishing access and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for fishing participants associated with the coastal fishing community of Santa Cruz (~2-3 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

No. There are no potential interactions or effects on any of the other 2023 MPA petitions, though it should be noted that 2023-33MPA_7_AM1 proposes to create a new MPA less than five miles east of Natural Bridges SMR (see below).

2023-33MPA_7_AM1: Create new SMCA near Pleasure Point with allowance for recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and spearfishing.

QUESTION 1: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SUPPORT THE MPA NETWORK IN MEETING ONE OR MORE OF THE MLPA GOALS AND ALIGN WITH MPA MASTER PLAN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

No. The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals as a whole. As such, CDFW has evaluated this action within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management. See Question 1 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives.

The petitioner asserts that the proposed MPA would align with Goals 1-4, which address preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting representative habitats for their intrinsic value. However, within the broader adaptive management framework for the statewide MPA Network, it is not evident that establishing Pleasure Point SMCA would advance Network-level management.

The stated purpose of the petition is to protect patches of kelp identified by the petitioner as being healthy and highly persistent. While this intent is theoretically aligned with MLPA Goals, the petition does not present conclusive evidence tying specific drivers of kelp resilience in this location to enhancement through MPA protection. Given the current lack of understanding about place-based drivers of kelp persistence at this location, establishing an MPA here is not scientifically justified based on protecting kelp or supporting future restoration.

Additionally, the proposed regulations allow for the take of finfish from shore, which would give the proposed MPA an LOP of Moderate-low. This conflicts with the petitioner's

stated ecological goals, such as the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem function (Goal 1) or the conservation of marine life populations (Goal 2).

The minimal LOP for the proposed MPA, coupled with the small size, precludes the achievement of Goal 4. Though the proposed MPA would indeed contain unique marine life habitats (Goal 4), such as beach and kelp forest habitats, the MPA as proposed would not meet minimum science guidelines (see response to Question 9) and therefore would not contribute to Network replication goals for these habitats.

The area near the proposed MPA includes Santa Cruz Harbor as well as several state parks and beaches and already receives high levels of visitation for a wide range of consumptive and non-consumptive recreational activities. It is unclear how establishing an MPA that, based on MPA Science Guidelines, is not expected to produce its intended ecological benefits while simultaneously removing existing recreational consumptive opportunities would meaningfully improve public enjoyment (Goal 3) at an already popular and well-used location. It is also notable that, during the planning process, Natural Bridges SMR, located less than five miles west of the proposed SMCA at Pleasure Point, was designed specifically as an intertidal SMR to avoid anticipated negative socioeconomic impacts associated with siting an SMR near Santa Cruz Harbor. Similar considerations remain relevant to this proposal, since the proposed MPA would only allow recreational fishing from shore.

The SMCA as proposed could be managed and enforced as part of the Network, but the stated objectives are not sufficient justification for the creation of a new MPA and do not appear to align with sound scientific guidelines (Goal 5).

Lastly, the MLPA Initiative planning process set a clear precedent for creating and managing California's MPAs as a cohesive Network through a long-term, robust, science-based, stakeholder-driven process (Goal 6). Establishing a new MPA through CFGC's petition process without significant scientific vetting and engagement with tribes and the public is not in line with this foundation.

QUESTION 2A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADVANCE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE DECADAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW?

No. The proposed change does not advance adaptive management recommendations from the DMR (CDFW 2022). See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and DMR Recommendations.

QUESTION 2B: IF NOT, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ADDRESS A CURRENT OR EMERGING MPA MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE?

No. The petitioner cites climate-related declines in kelp forests as justification for creating a new SMCA, suggesting that increasing the amount of protected kelp habitat and removing direct human impacts would help conserve remaining kelp canopy and improve restoration potential. While kelp forests are highly valuable and their decline since MPA implementation is a significant management concern, it is not clear that this issue represents an MPA-specific management challenge, nor one best addressed by expanding MPA boundaries, particularly without evidence of place-based mechanisms or drivers linked to kelp persistence.

Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts on kelp remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to kelp forest resilience in the context of climate change and how best to mitigate impacts. If warming ocean temperatures are the primary driver of kelp decline in California, expanding MPA boundaries alone is unlikely to provide significant benefits.

Given these uncertainties, pursuing the creation of a new MPA with the objective of protecting kelp without stronger scientific basis and a coordinated management strategy would be premature. Currently, the proposed new MPA at Pleasure Point does not clearly address a demonstrated MPA management challenge, nor is it evident that creating the MPA is the appropriate tool for addressing broader kelp management concerns in California. The forthcoming KRMP will provide a comprehensive strategy to guide future kelp management decisions statewide.

QUESTION 3: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING CFGC NON-MPA REGULATIONS, PERMITS, OR LEASES (E.G., KELP LEASES, AQUACULTURE LEASES, EXPERIMENTAL FISHING PERMITS)?

Yes. The proposed MPA overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 221, which is open. Open kelp beds are available to commercial kelp harvest and leases cannot be issued.

Commercial kelp harvest was last reported in this bed in 2024. Additional seasonal restrictions are set by MBNMS.

QUESTION 4: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT EXISTING REGULATIONS, PERMITS, LEASES, OR MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF ANY OTHER AGENCY OR ENTITY?

Yes. The proposed MPA overlaps granted lands held by Santa Cruz County. The County was granted sovereign tidelands and submerged lands in 1935, primarily for the establishment, maintenance, and operation of coastal facilities, such as a harbor, wharves, docks, and boathouses. It is unclear whether the proposed change would affect the County's management activities.

There are active leases authorized by the State Lands Commission along the shoreward boundary of the proposed MPA that may be affected by the proposed change. It is unclear whether the proposed change would have direct effects on the State Lands Commission's management activities.

The proposed MPA is inside the MBNMS, which is federally administered by NOAA. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities. CDFW would need to work with NOAA on coordinated enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

This list may not be exhaustive. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Tribal governments, other agencies, and entities not identified here.

QUESTION 5: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. When evaluating this petition, CDFW reviewed the information in the petition, as well as information including, but not limited to:

- MLPA Planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Existing science pertaining to kelp recovery in MPAs,
- Long-term monitoring data related to kelp in MPAs,
- Satellite (1984-2023; Bell et al. 2025) and flyover (2002-06; 2008-10; 2013-16; CDFW 2024) mapping of statewide kelp canopy coverage, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change. Key information gaps include:

- Direct evidence of a place-based need linking kelp declines to specific driver(s) at this location,
- Consideration of socioeconomic and tribal interests and how these will be factored into the decision-making process with respect to kelp management at this location, and
- A statewide assessment of kelp restoration and recovery tools developed through the KRMP.

While important management concerns related to kelp recovery and restoration are raised in the petition, the petitioner did not present sufficient information to justify the proposed change as the appropriate solution.

Long-term MPA monitoring data indicate we have early, though inconsistent, evidence that MPAs may enhance resilience to climate change and other disturbances for ecosystems within their borders. Continued, consistent monitoring is necessary to determine which factors are most influential in supporting kelp recovery and resilience and how these factors vary regionally.

QUESTION 6: ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED TO INFORM THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

Yes. The forthcoming KRMP is the crucial management framework to have in place before considering MPA regulatory changes aimed at protecting kelp.

QUESTION 7A: WAS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSIDERED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Yes. During the MLPA Initiative planning process for the Central Coast Planning Region, a small intertidal MPA with a similar alongshore span and an allowance for finfish take from shore was included in Package 3R, one of three packages advanced by the Blue Ribbon Task Force (MLPA 2006). This MPA was not incorporated into the preferred alternative or rulemaking package.

QUESTION 7B: IS THERE NEW INFORMATION AVAILABLE, CHANGING CONDITIONS SINCE THE MLPA IMPLEMENTATION PHASE, AND/OR INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE DMR THAT WARRANTS REEVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE?

No. The petitioner cites new analyses identifying California kelp beds that may be more resilient to disturbance, as well as recent scientific literature investigating

the effects of MPA protection on kelp forests. Additionally, several recent studies highlight enhanced kelp resilience within MPAs in the South Coast in particular. However, a broad view of the best available science does not indicate consistent or reliable benefits to kelp resulting from MPA protection. As a result, there is not sufficient evidence to support the proposed change as an effective solution. Without direct, location-specific links between drivers and kelp persistence or decline, expanding MPAs for kelp recovery is unlikely to have a biologically meaningful impact on kelp and might unnecessarily restrict more effective restoration activities in the process.

Local drivers of kelp persistence and resilience need to be identified first, and management actions must be tailored to address those drivers. Therefore, pursuing this change ahead of additional long-term data collection and the KRMP, which will provide the essential management framework to guide future kelp management decisions, would be premature.

Therefore, while large-scale kelp declines and the occurrence of climate change-related disturbances do indicate changing conditions since the implementation phase, the petitioner did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant revisiting this decision.

QUESTION 8: IF THE PROPOSED CHANGE AFFECTS AN EXISTING MPA, DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE MPA IDENTIFIED DURING THE MLPA INITIATIVE PLANNING PROCESS OR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF MPAS AROUND THE NORTHERN CHANNEL ISLANDS?

Not Applicable. The proposed change does not affect an existing MPA.

QUESTION 9: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL MPA OR MPA NETWORK DESIGN SO THAT IT BETTER ALIGNS WITH OR MEETS THE MPA SCIENCE GUIDELINES?

No. The MLPA requires that the design of individual MPAs and the statewide Network be based on the best readily available science and that MPAs be of adequate size, number, protection level, and location to meet MLPA Goals. The science guidelines developed by the Science Advisory Team and outlined in the Master Plan were created specifically to provide this scientific foundation and serve as the starting point for evaluating alternative MPA proposals. Alignment with these guidelines depends on LOP, which is determined by allowed take, and spatial configuration. More specifically, these guidelines require that an MPA must be at least 9 square miles and meet one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) to contribute to ecological goals such as habitat replication and representation.

The proposed new MPA would be 3.1 square miles with a Moderate-low LOP, based on proposed take regulations (Table 7). Because it does not meet either minimum critera, implementation of the proposed change would not improve the design of the MPA Network or enhance alignment with the MLPA Science Guidelines. See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the MLPA Science Guidelines and additional context.

QUESTION 10A: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE ALIGN WITH CDFW FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?

No. The proposed change would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: boundaries are not described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude, and it is unclear if the landmarks suggested by the petitioner to identify the proposed boundaries are easily recognizable for both shore- and boat-based users. Additionally, the offshore boundary does not extend to the 3 nm state water boundary. See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

> ### **QUESTION 10B:** IF NOT, IS THERE A RATIONALE FOR MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGE OR AN ALTERNATIVE THAT COULD MEET THE INTENT BUT BETTER ALIGN WITH FEASIBILITY GUIDELINES?
>
> **No**. There is no rationale for moving forward with the proposed change or an alternative that better aligns with the Feasibility Guidelines.

QUESTION 11: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ENFORCEABILITY OF MPA REGULATIONS?

No. In general, partial take MPAs are more difficult to enforce than No-take MPAs because partial take MPAs may lead to increased instances of unintentional non-compliance with MPA regulations.

The proposed new MPA would result in enforcement challenges associated with the boundaries because they do not align with the Feasibility Guidelines. The boundaries are not aligned with readily determinable lines of latitude and longitude or easily recognizable permanent landmarks, and the offshore boundary does not extend to the 3 nm state water boundary, all of which compromises enforceability.

Additionally, because this is a proposed new MPA, there is an anticipated period of non-compliance following regulatory changes, particularly when additional restrictions are implemented. This would require additional resource investments in outreach, education, and enforcement to support enforcement and compliance.

QUESTION 12: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE SIMPLIFY REGULATORY LANGUAGE OR ENHANCE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WITHOUT CHANGING THE INTENT OF THE MPA?

No. It would not simplify any existing regulatory language. The proposed change would require the addition of new regulatory language, which is somewhat complex for a partial-take SMCA.

QUESTION 13: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE PROTECTION OF MARINE RESOURCES?

Yes. The proposed change could maintain or enhance local protection of marine resources by adding MPA protection, thus prohibiting many extractive activities. However, some consumptive uses would still be permitted and the MPA as proposed would have a Moderate-low LOP, which could compromise any benefits gained. Furthermore, the proposed MPA is not large enough to contribute towards replication goals for key habitats, such as kelp forests. Since the petitioner's primary intent is to increase protections for kelp forest habitat within MPAs, it is uncertain whether the proposed expansion would produce the kelp resiliency benefits anticipated by the petitioner. While MPAs may indirectly support kelp, they are not considered the best available management tool at this time, especially when the drivers behind the current decline are systemic rather than location specific. Considering this, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the creation of this MPA for the purpose of supporting kelp persistence or recovery.

QUESTION 14: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE PROVIDE MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES (E.G., FISHING, EDUCATIONAL, AND/OR OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES) FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED OR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 15: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT CONSUMPTIVE AND/OR NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES? IF SO, HOW?

Yes. The proposed change has the potential to affect both consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

The proposed MPA would be easily accessible for both shore- and boat-based users through numerous coastal access points, with the boat launch at Capitola Wharf approximately 0.2 miles away, and the Santa Cruz Harbor approximately 1.1 miles away. This high accessibility would allow continued use of both consumptive recreational and non-consumptive activities.

Though the area is easily accessible, the proposed regulations would restrict all recreational fishing activities except shore-based take by hook-and-line and spearfishing. This is a popular area for boat-based fishing for nearshore groundfish, salmon, and halibut. Limiting access could therefore have significant impacts on local recreational fishing opportunities.

Commercial consumptive uses would also be adversely impacted, with negative impacts to the commercial salmon, nearshore groundfish, and highly migratory species fisheries expected. The proposed MPA is within a high-value commercial fishing block.

Regarding research and study opportunities, there do not appear to be any long-term monitoring sites within the boundaries of the proposed expansion.

QUESTION 16: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY?

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

QUESTION 17: IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE CONSISTENT WITH CFGC COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITIES POLICY?

The following analysis was prepared by CFGC staff. See Question 17 of Attachment 1 for additional context on CFGC's response. The proposed change would reduce fishing access and add more regulatory burdens, particularly for fishing participants associated with the coastal fishing community of Santa Cruz (~2-3 nm away from area of proposed change).

QUESTION 18: DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE INTERACT WITH OR HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT PROPOSED CHANGES IN OTHER 2023 MPA PETITIONS?

No. There are no potential interactions or effects on any of the other 2023 MPA petitions, though it should be noted that 2023-33MPA_6_AM1 proposes to expand Natural Bridges SMR, which is less than five miles west of the proposed Pleasure Point SMCA (see above).

V. SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES, DATA AND INFORMATION, AND CITATIONS

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. 2023-33MPA_1_AM1 (proposed expansion Cabrillo SMR) MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed Cabrillo SMR, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is

reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Existing	Proposed	Change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	0.39	**10.43**	2,574
Level of Protection	**Very High**	**Very High**	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	13.0	82.3	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	9e-4	9e-4	0
Kelp (mi)	0.49[a]	**3.00**	512
Beach (mi)	0.90	**1.73**	92
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	**0.97**	**3.27**	237
Estuaries (sq mi)	—	—	—
Hard Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	0.23[b]	**2.56**	N/A
30-100 m (sq mi)	—	0.11	N/A
100-200 m (sq mi)	—	0.04	N/A
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
Soft Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	0.15[b]	0.48	N/A
30-100 m (sq mi)	—	**6.31**	N/A
100-200 m (sq mi)	—	0.18	N/A
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—

[a] Measured by hand since MPA polygon does not overlap the linear kelp dataset

[b] Measured in square miles rather than linear miles because the MPA polygon does not overlap the linear substrate dataset

Table 2. 2023-33MPA_2_AM1 (proposed expansion Point Dume SMCA and addition of recreational take from shore by hook and line and spearfishing)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed Point Dume SMCA, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold). Point Dume SMCA meets those requirements when clustered with Point Dume SMR. If the take allowance proposed by the petition were granted, the cluster would no longer meet these criteria.

	SMR Existing	SMCA Existing	Cluster Existing	SMCA Proposed	Cluster Proposed	SMCA change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	7.53	15.92	**23.45**	20.69	**28.22**	30
Level of Protection	Very High	High	**High**	Mod-Low	Mod-Low	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	0	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	649.4	683.4	683.4	683.4	683.4	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kelp (mi)	1.29	1.60	**2.89**	2.95	**4.24**	84
Beach (mi)	2.56	4.03	**6.59**	5.30	**7.86**	32
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	1.34	0.46	**1.80**	0.56	**1.90**	22
Estuaries (sq mi)	—	3e-5	3e-5	3e-5	3e-5	0
Hard Substrate						
0-30 m (mi)	0.02	0.08	0.10	0.32	0.34	300
30-100 m (sq mi)	4e-3	2e-3	6e-3	0.09	0.09	4400
100-200 m (sq mi)	4e-3	1e-3	5e-3	1e-3	5e-3	0
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Soft Substrate						
0-30 m (mi)	2.23	4.12	**6.35**	5.21	**7.44**	26
30-100 m (sq mi)	1.04	5.69	**6.73**	7.67	**8.71**	35
100-200 m (sq mi)	0.72	1.57	**2.29**	2.42	**3.14**	54
>200 m (sq mi)	4.42	5.66	**10.08**	6.39	**10.81**	13

Table 3. 2023-33MPA_3 (proposed expansion South Point SMR)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed South Point SMR, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Existing	Proposed	Change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	**13.08**	**40.96**	213
Level of Protection	**Very High**	**Very High**	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	392.9	395.7	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—	—	—
Kelp (mi)	**3.78**	**11.96**	216
Beach (mi)	**1.45**	**6.49**	348
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	**3.47**	**10.26**	196
Estuaries (sq mi)	—	—	—
Hard Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	**1.29**	**3.15**	144
30-100 m (sq mi)	**0.26**	**0.99**	281
100-200 m (sq mi)	4e-3	5e-3	25
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
Soft Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	**2.49**	**8.39**	237
30-100 m (sq mi)	**3.57**	**11.83**	231
100-200 m (sq mi)	**5.70**	**8.23**	44
>200 m (sq mi)	**1.63**	**4.22**	159

Table 4. 2023-33MPA_4 (proposed expansion Gull Island SMR)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed Gull Island SMR, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Existing	Proposed	Change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	**19.93**	**21.67**	9
Level of Protection	**Very High**	**Very High**	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	698.1	698.1	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—	—	—
Kelp (mi)	**3.11**	**5.70**	83
Beach (mi)	**2.29**	**4.70**	105
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	**1.89**	**3.61**	91
Estuaries (sq mi)	—	—	—
Hard Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	**2.18**	**2.31**	6
30-100 m (sq mi)	0.14	0.14	0
100-200 m (sq mi)	**0.17**	**0.17**	0
>200 m (sq mi)	**2.09**	**2.09**	0
Soft Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	**2.79**	**4.83**	73
30-100 m (sq mi)	**3.89**	**4.61**	19
100-200 m (sq mi)	**3.36**	**3.36**	0
>200 m (sq mi)	**7.40**	**7.40**	0

Table 5. 2023-33MPA_5 (proposed expansion Point Conception SMR)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed Point Conception SMR, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Existing	Proposed	Change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	**22.52**	**37.18**	65
Level of Protection	**Very High**	**Very High**	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	153.5	153.5	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—	—	—
Kelp (mi)	**2.27**	**6.47**	185
Beach (mi)	**1.98**	**5.59**	182
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	**3.43**	**6.18**	80
Estuaries (sq mi)	—	—	—
Hard Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	0.15	**1.96**	1207
30-100 m (sq mi)	**0.57**	**0.81**	42
100-200 m (sq mi)	9e-4	9e-4	0
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
Soft Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	**3.67**	**6.05**	65
30-100 m (sq mi)	**15.34**	**23.54**	53
100-200 m (sq mi)	**3.60**	**3.60**	0
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—

Table 6. 2023-33MPA_6_AM1 (proposed expansion Natural Bridges SMR)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of the existing and proposed Natural Bridges SMR, including the percent change associated with the proposed action(s) in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. Percent change is calculated by dividing the difference between proposed and existing values by the existing value and multiplying by 100. Percent change is reported as N/A when the calculation is not possible, such as when the existing MPA does not contain the habitat type or when existing and proposed values are reported in different units. A dash (—) indicates that the MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Existing	Proposed	Change (%)
MPA Area (sq mi)	0.25	**14.67**	5768
Level of Protection	**Very High**	**Very High**	—
Min Depth (m)	0	0	—
Max Depth (m)	3.2	72.9	—
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—	—	—
Kelp (mi)	0.17[a]	4.16	2347
Beach (mi)	**3.10**	**3.28**	6
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	**3.79**	**3.87**	2
Estuaries (sq mi)	2e-3	2e-3	0
Hard Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	0.16[b]	**1.42**	N/A
30-100 m (sq mi)	—	0.14	N/A
100-200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
Soft Substrate			
0-30 m (mi)	0.05[b]	**2.76**	N/A
30-100 m (sq mi)	—	**10.68**	N/A
100-200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—	—	—

[a] Measured by hand since MPA polygon does not overlap the linear kelp dataset

[b] Measured in square miles rather than linear miles because the MPA polygon does not overlap the linear substrate dataset

Table 7. 2023-33MPA_7_AM1 (proposed new Pleasure Point SMCA)

MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of Pleasure Point SMCA as proposed in petition 2023-MPA33_AM. A dash (—) indicates that the proposed MPA does not contain the habitat type. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance.

Values shown in **bold** indicate that the MPA attribute meets the relevant science guideline established by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq mi) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold).

	Proposed
MPA Area (sq mi)	3.13
Level of Protection	Mod-Low
Min Depth (m)	0
Max Depth (m)	28.8
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—
Kelp (mi)	**1.33**
Beach (mi)	**1.37**
Rocky Intertidal (mi)	0.55
Estuaries (sq mi)	—
Hard Substrate	
0-30 m (mi)	0.01
30-100 m (sq mi)	—
100-200 m (sq mi)	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—
Soft Substrate	
0-30 m (mi)	**1.16**
30-100 m (sq mi)	—
100-200 m (sq mi)	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—

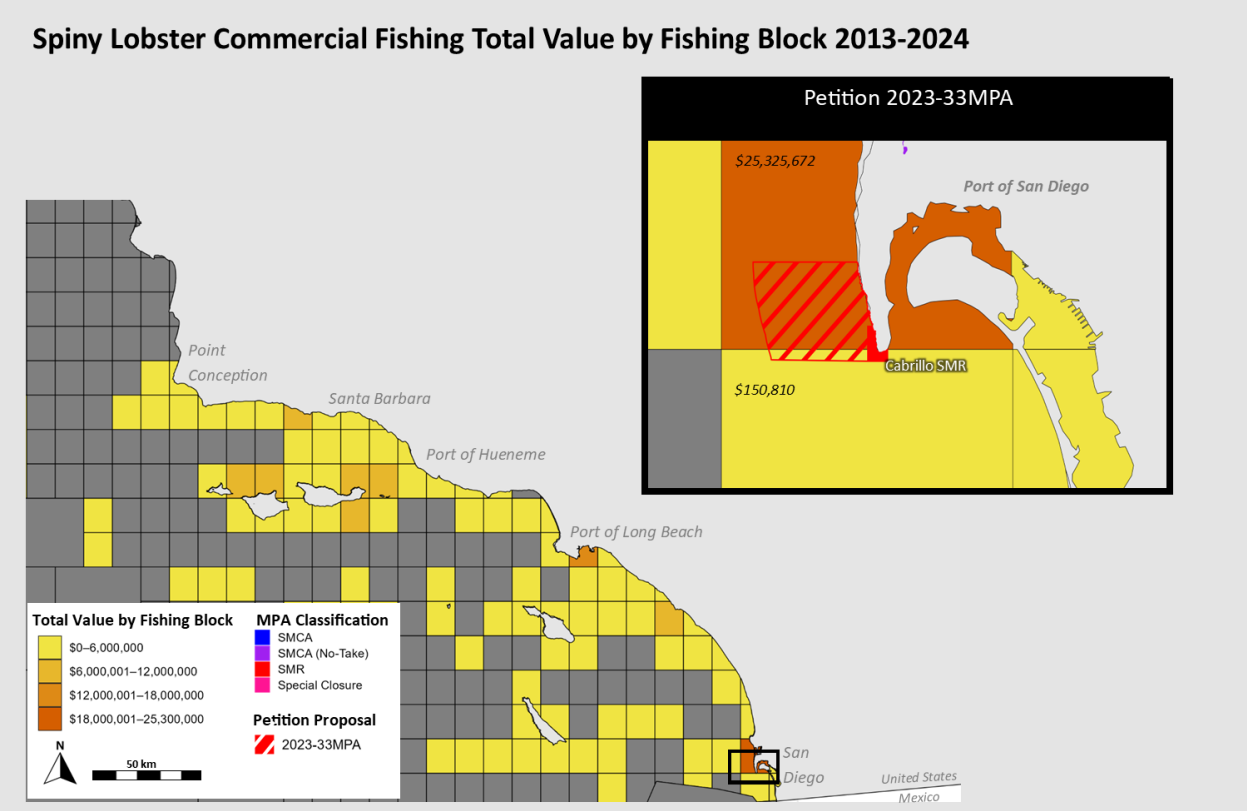

Figure 1. Total value (in millions $US) of commercially caught spiny lobster (*P. interruptus*) from 2013 to 2024 by CDFW fishing block for the South Coast Bioregion with reference to Petition 2023-33MPA_AM.

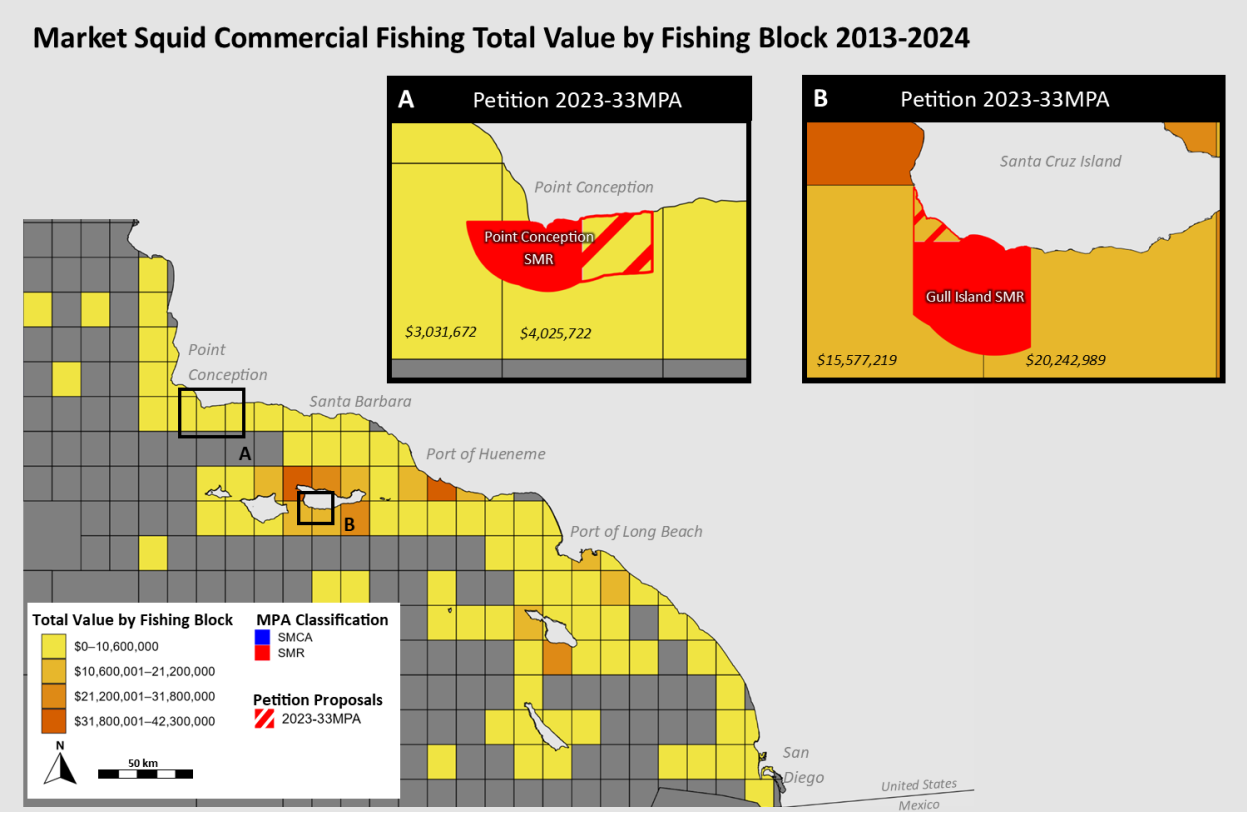

Figure 2. Total value (in millions $US) of commercially caught California market squid (*Doryteuthis opalescens*) from 2013 to 2024 by CDFW fishing block for the South Coast Bioregion with reference to petition 2023-33MPA_AM. Actual value provided within fishing blocks that overlap with the proposed boundary expansion of (A) Point Conception SMR and (B) Gull Island SMR.

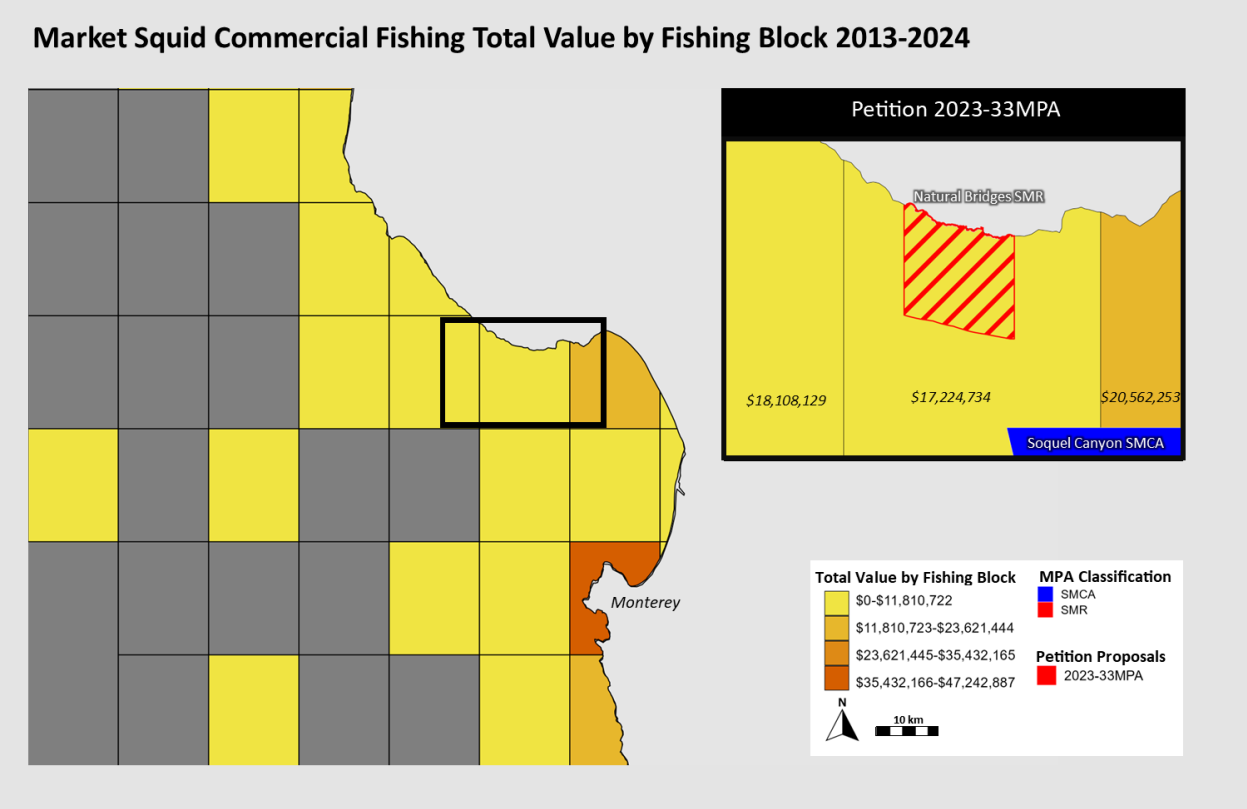

Figure 3. Total value (in millions $US) of commercially caught California market squid (*Doryteuthis opalescens*) from 2013 to 2024 by CDFW fishing block for the Central Coast with reference to petition 2023-33MPA_AM. Actual value provided within fishing blocks that overlap/are adjacent with the proposed boundary expansion of Natural Bridges SMR.

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