

Staff Overview for May 19, 2026
MPA Agenda Items

Introduction to Regional Bin 2 Marine Protected Area Petitions and Evaluations

Today's Item

Information ☒

Action ☐

This regional meeting focuses on marine protected area (MPA) petitions with proposed actions across Los Angeles County through San Diego County, including Santa Catalina Island. For each petition, the Commission will receive presentations from MPA petitioner(s), ask clarifying questions, receive community input, and discuss petitioned actions and recommendations. The Commission may develop recommendations for consideration at a future meeting. No formal action will be taken today.

This staff summary provides an overview and background relevant to the four petitions and regional actions listed under Agenda Items 2–5.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Received 20 MPA petitions December 2023
- Referred 20 MPA petitions to Marine Resources Committee (MRC) and Department for review and recommendation February 2024
- Approved MRC recommendation for sorting MPA petitions and evaluating individual actions within “binned” petitions, and supported scheduling consideration of individual actions as recommendations were ready August 2024
- MRC received Department recommendations for individual actions proposed in 5 “bin 1” MPA petitions and developed MRC recommendations; recommendations adopted by Commission November 2024; MRC and December 2024
- Petitioners for the 15 “bin 2” petitions afforded an opportunity to amend petitions December 2024 – March 2025
- MRC received Department proposal for bin 2 petition evaluation framework and developed recommendations for grouping the 15 MPA petitions in bin 2 for future review and discussion July 16-17, 2025; MRC
- Received and approved MRC recommendation for the bin 2 petition evaluation framework, with one modification related to a question about tribal leadership/sponsorship of petitions August 13-14, 2025
- Tribal Committee (TC) received overview from tribal leads or co-leads of 5 MPA petitions; received Department presentation, and developed TC recommendation April 14, 2026; TC

Staff Overview for May 19, 2026 MPA Agenda Items

- Approved TC recommendation for Department to evaluate 5 *revised* tribally led or co-led petitions *as proposed on April 14*; received Department bin 2 petition evaluations for 10 non-tribally led or co-led petitions April 15-16, 2026
- At San Mateo regional MPA meeting, receive petitioner presentations, ask clarifying questions, receive community input, and discuss region-specific petitioned actions in 6 MPA petitions April 21, 2026
- At Goleta regional MPA meeting, receive petitioner presentations, ask clarifying questions, receive community input, and discuss region-specific petitioned actions in 15 MPA petitions (7 petitions on May 5; 8 petitions on May 6) May 5–6, 2026
- **At San Clemente regional MPA meeting, receive petitioner presentations, ask clarifying questions, receive community input, and discuss region-specific petitioned actions in 4 MPA petitions** May 19, 2026

Background

In early 2023, the state completed the first 10-year review of the statewide MPA network and management program. The “decadal management review” (known as the DMR) generated significant public interest in contributing to adaptive management of the network, including through public proposals to modify existing MPAs or management approaches. In response, the Commission agreed to accept public proposals using its existing process for public petitions for regulation change. The Commission set a submission deadline for late November 2023 for receipt at the December 2023 Commission meeting.

In November 2023, the Commission received 20 petitions proposing modifications to MPAs or new MPAs. By late 2024, the Commission acted on five of the petitions—categorized as “bin 1” for near-term evaluation—leaving 15 “bin 2” petitions for additional evaluation under a [bin 2 evaluation framework](#) approved by the Commission.

Petition Amendments (Formal and Informal)

Bin 2 petitioners were provided an opportunity until March 2025 to submit formal amendments to their original petitions, to be integrated into evaluations to be conducted by the Department. Since the March 2025 amendment deadline, several petitioners have identified additional requested changes for the Commission’s awareness, noting these revisions respond to community concerns or, in one case, input from the U.S. Department of Defense.

For tribally led or co-led petitions, the Commission provided additional time for the Department to consult with tribes and for California tribes to formally join petitions as co-sponsors. The Commission also requested that tribally led or co-led petitions be discussed at the April 14, 2026 Tribal Committee (TC) meeting and potentially provide a recommendation to the Commission.

Staff Overview for May 19, 2026 MPA Agenda Items

For non-tribally led petitions, the Commission supported the Department's and staff's request to not incorporate additional, informal, post-deadline amendments into the evaluation process. Instead, petitioners were asked to describe any proposed changes not reflected in their original or amended petitions during regional MPA petition meetings, scheduled for after Department evaluations were released.

Department Evaluations

On March 20, 2026, the Department released its evaluations and recommendations for 10 of the 15 petitions — those not led or co-led by tribes or tribal communities. The Department's evaluations were informed in part by Commission staff's work on two evaluation questions. The materials released included a Department transmittal memo (Exhibit 1), a petition evaluation companion document (Exhibit 2) with supplemental information and additional context across the petition evaluations, and petition-specific analyses (see exhibits for staff summaries 3A – 3F). The documents generated substantial public interest, with approximately 20 substantive comment letters received in advance of the Commission's April 15-16, 2026 meeting.

At the Commission's April 2026 meeting, the Department presented a summary of its evaluations and recommendations (see Exhibit 3 for presentation slides) for all proposed actions associated with the 10 non-tribal petitions; this provided the Commission an opportunity to hear a consolidated overview, ask clarifying questions, and receive additional public input. There is a [Zoom recording of the Department presentation and public/Commission discussion](#).

Evaluations for the five tribally led or co-led petitions are currently in development. Consistent with the Commission's request, the Department attended the April 14, 2026 TC meeting to hear presentations from tribal leads and co-leads and to seek guidance before completing its evaluations. The tribal leads and co-leads of the five petitions shared their goals, updates, clarifications, and any desired revisions to the original petitions. Participants and TC discussed proceeding with evaluating the five tribally led/co-led bin 2 petitions as described at the meeting. During the April 15-16, 2026 Commission meeting, the Commission adopted the TC recommendation to formally accept clarifications and revisions to three of the tribally-led or co-led petitions, and requested the Department proceed with evaluating the petitions with revisions incorporated.

Input from California Ocean Protection Council (OPC)

In addition to the Department's evaluations, the executive director of the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC), on behalf of OPC Chair and Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot, submitted a letter to the Commission (Exhibit 4) providing input on proposals to adaptively manage California's MPA network, with the stated intent to complement the Department's evaluations. The letter highlights OPC's unique policy role in California's MPA network, supporting adaptive management, using MPAs to protect full ecosystems, prioritizing tribal stewardship, and supporting thriving fishing communities and climate-resilient fisheries. In the near future, OPC plans to provide specific input on the petitions using a policy lens that can complement the Department's assessment completed using questions and criteria

Staff Overview for May 19, 2026 MPA Agenda Items

established by the Commission. OPC now anticipates transmitting its input for the June 2026 Commission meeting.

Regional Meetings

The Department's evaluation and recommendation presentation, TC discussion and input on tribally led and co-led petitions, and public input on both has helped lay the foundation for robust public dialogue at the regional scale in three regionally-located public meetings.

The Commission is commencing this regional meeting as one of three — April 21, May 5–6, and May 19 — to hear from petitioners and the public on bin 2 MPA petitions, including both the Department-evaluated petitions and the tribally led or co-led petitions still under review. The meetings are designed to provide petitioners an opportunity to present their petitions, describe any proposed changes since the March 2025 amendment deadline, and engage in dialogue with the Commission alongside robust public participation.

Additional information about the petitions and regional meetings is available on the Commission's website, including:

- the [MPA petitions process webpage](#) outlining the public process for reviewing 2023 MPA petitions and providing key resource links;
- the [MPA petitions index](#), with access to each 2023 MPA petition and compiled public comments received since December 2023;
- [regional MPA meeting agendas and materials](#); and
- [regional meeting goals and participation guidelines](#).

For petition-specific information, public comments, and Department evaluations, see individual exhibits listed at the bottom of each MPA agenda item staff summary for today's meeting.

Exhibits

1. [Department memo transmitting evaluations for non-tribally led or co-led MPA petitions](#), received March 20, 2026
2. [Department "2023 Decadal Management Review Marine Protected Area Petition Evaluation Companion Document"](#) for completed MPA petition evaluations, dated March 20, 2026
3. [Department presentation from Agenda Item 2, Commission April 15-16, 2026 meeting \(for background purposes only\)](#)
4. [Letter from Jenn Eckerle, Executive Director, California Ocean Protection Council, and Deputy Secretary for Oceans, California Natural Resources Agency](#), received March 20, 2026

Motion (N/A)

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 20, 2026

To: Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission

From: Craig Shuman
Marine Regional Manager

Subject: CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluations for the Ten Non-Tribally-led Petitions

At its February 14-15, 2024, meeting, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) referred 20 Marine Protected Area (MPA) petitions to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for review, evaluation, and recommendation. Throughout 2024, CDFW implemented a [3-phased approach](#) to evaluate MPA petitions which was supported by the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) and approved by CFGC in April 2024. The MRC considered CDFW's recommendations on 5 petitions (Bin 1) at the November 6-7, 2024, MRC meeting and CFGC adopted [the recommendations](#) at the December 11-12, 2024, CFGC meeting.

At the March 13, 2025, MRC meeting, CDFW presented the proposed timeline and process for the remaining 15 petitions (Bin 2). This included the development of an evaluation framework for the Bin 2 petitions and sorting the petitions into groups to facilitate subsequent petition discussions. CFGC approved the proposed timeline and process at their April 16-17, 2025, meeting. CDFW, with support from staff at CFGC and the Ocean Protection Council, developed the draft 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework for the MRC's consideration at the July 16-17, 2025, meeting, which was approved by CFGC at their August 2025 meeting with minor modifications. CDFW has completed the Evaluations and Recommendations for the ten non-Tribally-led petitions (Attachments 2-11) as listed below. CDFW's recommendations on the ten non-Tribally-led petitions are based on petitions and amendments received as of March 2025. **Additional changes, amendments and interested party engagements completed by petitioners after that date have not been considered as part of the evaluation and recommendations.** CDFW recognizes that new information on these petitions may be available for CFGC consideration.



Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director

March 20, 2026

Page 2

- **2023-14MPA:** Modify take in 9 SMCAs to Allow Commercial Take of Sea Urchins
- **2023-15MPA-AM:** Reclassify Footprint, Gull Island, and Santa Barbara Island SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Take of Highly Migratory Species
- **2023-16MPA:** Reclassify Stewarts Point and Bodega Head SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Commercial Salmon Trolling
- **2023-18MPA:** Modify Allowed Uses at Several Santa Barbara Channel MPAs and Special Closures: Vandenberg SMR, Kashtayit SMCA, and San Miguel and Anacapa Island Special Closures
- **2023-23MPA-AM:** Modify Allowed Uses in Four Monterey Area MPAs, Create a New MPA, and Other Requests
- **2023-24MPA-AM:** Expand Boundaries of Laguna Beach No-take SMCA
- **2023-27MPA-AM:** Amend Existing Anacapa Island SMCA or Special Closure to Protect Eelgrass
- **2023-32MPA:** Reclassify Duxbury Reef SMCA to an SMR and Expand the Southern and Northern Boundaries
- **2023-33MPA-AM:** 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
- **2023-34MPA:** Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR and Limit Allowable Uses at Farnsworth Onshore and Offshore SMCAs to Recreational Spearfishing

CDFW also prepared a 2023 Decadal Management Review Marine Protected Area Petition Evaluation Companion Document (Companion Document; Attachment 1). The Companion Document should be read in advance of the petition evaluations as it includes supplemental information and additional context that is relevant for all the evaluations. The Companion Document includes a summary of CDFW's outreach to California Native American tribes and engagement with Tribally-led petitioners. CDFW plans to provide an update on the Tribally-led petitions at the Tribal Committee meeting on April 14, 2026.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact me at r7regionalmgr@wildlife.ca.gov.

Attachment 1: CDFW's 2023 Decadal Management Review Marine Protected Area Petition Evaluation Companion Document

Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director

March 20, 2026

Page 2

Attachment 2: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-14MPA:**
Modify take in 9 SMCAs to Allow Commercial Take of Sea Urchins

Attachment 3: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-15MPA-AM:**
Reclassify Footprint, Gull Island, and Santa Barbara Island SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Take of Highly Migratory Species

Attachment 4: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-16MPA:**
Reclassify Stewarts Point and Bodega Head SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Commercial Salmon Trolling.

Attachment 5: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-18MPA:**
Modify Allowed Uses at Several Santa Barbara Channel MPAs: Vandenberg SMR, Kashtayit SMCA, and San Miguel and Anacapa Island Special Closures

Attachment 6: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-23MPA-AM:**
Modify Allowed Uses in Four Monterey Area MPAs, Create a New MPA, and Other Requests

Attachment 7: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-24MPA-AM:**
Expand Boundaries of Laguna Beach No-take SMCA

Attachment 8: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-27MPA-AM:**
Amend existing Anacapa Island SMCA or Special Closure to Protect Eelgrass

Attachment 9: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-32MPA:**
Reclassify Duxbury Reef SMCA to an SMR and Expand the Southern and Northern Boundaries

Attachment 10: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-33MPA-AM:**
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

Attachment 11: CDFW Evaluation and Recommendations for **2023-34MPA:**
Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR and Limit Allowable Uses at Farnsworth Onshore and Offshore SMCAs to Recreational Spearfishing

ec: Meghan Hertel, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director
Wildlife and Fisheries Division

Kevin Thomas, Deputy Director
Regional Operations

Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director

March 20, 2026

Page 2

Nathaniel Arnold, Chief
Law Enforcement Division

Wendy Bogdan, General Counsel
Office of General Counsel

Claire Waggoner, Marine Region Habitat
Conservation Program Manager
Marine Region

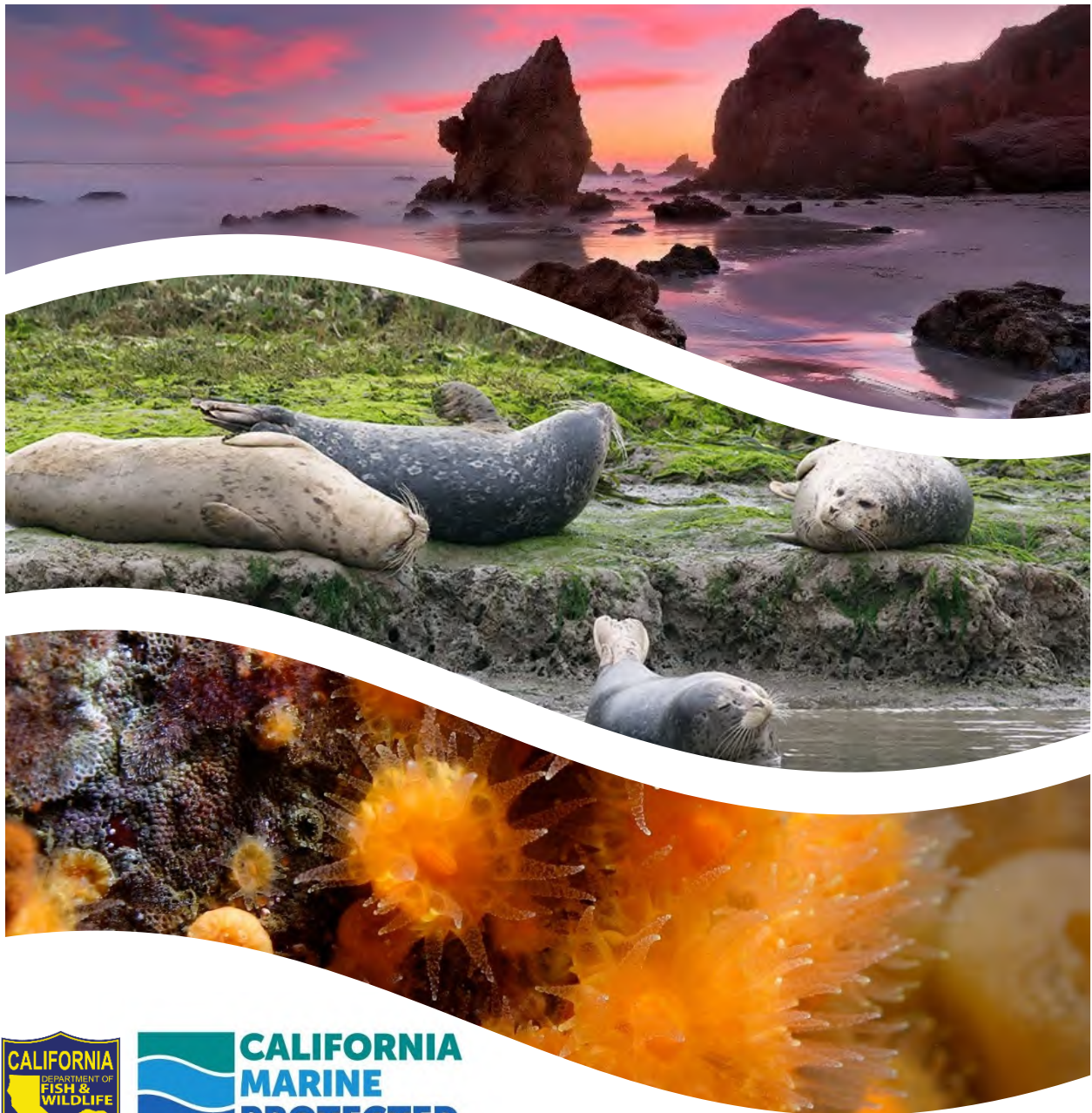
Erica Mason, Statewide Marine Protected Area
Management Project Supervisor
Marine Region

Jenn Eckerle, Deputy Secretary for Ocean and
Coastal Policy Natural Resources Agency

Attachment 1

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

COMPANION DOCUMENT



March 20, 2026

Attachment I: Companion Document

This document is the 2023 Decadal Management Review Marine Protected Area Petition Evaluation Companion Document (Companion Document). The Companion Document and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Transmittal Memo should be read in advance of the 2023 Bin 2 Petition Evaluations as it includes supplemental information and additional context for the evaluations.

INTRODUCTION

At its February 14-15, 2024, meeting, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) referred 20 Marine Protected Area (MPA) petitions to CDFW for review, evaluation, and recommendation. These petitions were sorted into Bin 1 and Bin 2 petitions. The Marine Resources Committee (MRC) considered CDFW's recommendations on 5 Bin 1 petitions at the November 6-7, 2024 MRC meeting and CFGC adopted the MRC's recommendations at the December 11-12, 2024 CFGC meeting.

On August 14, 2025, the CFGC approved an evaluation framework (Framework) for the 15 [Bin 2 Petitions](#) referred to the CDFW proposing changes to the MPA Network. CDFW developed the Framework, with support from staff at CFGC and Ocean Protection Council (OPC), based on the adaptive management process outlined in chapter 4 of the [2016 Master Plan for MPAs](#). The 2016 Master Plan directs CDFW and CFGC to use the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) goals and mandates, MPA objectives, and design considerations as the primary basis for evaluating any action taken to make changes to the MPA Network. The 2016 Master Plan adaptive management process also includes consideration of emerging issues, such as changes to the MPA Network that would enhance climate resilience and/or help mitigate climate impacts. CDFW considered climate change effects throughout the evaluation, recognizing that the effects of climate change are overarching and climate resilience is an implicit goal of adaptive management of the MPA Network as a whole. The Framework also draws from the [Decadal Management Review \(DMR\)](#) and [recommendations](#), and the [MPA Regulation Change Petition Framework](#) approved by CFGC at their August 2023 meeting, which is rooted in the DMR recommendation cornerstones of MPA Governance, MPA Management Program Activities, and MPA Network Performance.

The Framework includes the following sections:

- I. Petition Summary
- II. CDFW Draft Recommendations with Brief Justifications
- III. Bin 2 Petition Grouping: Identify Tribally-led Petitions
- IV. CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Narrative and Evaluation
- V. Supplemental Analyses, Data and Information, and Citations

Attachment I: Companion Document

CDFW used the Framework to transparently evaluate petitions and develop recommendations to CFGC for the 2023 MPA Bin 2 petitions. The evaluations were based on materials submitted in December 2023 and amendments received through March 2025; subsequent changes, improvements, or stakeholder engagement undertaken by petitioners after March 2025 were not considered. CDFW recognizes that new information on these petitions may be available for CFGC consideration.

The Bin 2 petitions and petition actions vary in complexity, and the Framework is designed to address this spectrum of complexity. In some cases, it was more appropriate to evaluate Bin 2 petitions as a whole and in other cases, it was more appropriate to evaluate the individual proposed actions or grouped proposed actions that were similar within a petition. Not all evaluation components in Section IV applied to every proposed action or petition as they were not all relevant to each proposed action or petition. CDFW applied the evaluation components as appropriate, and the level of detail varied based on factors such as applicability of the question or information available. Non-regulatory requests were not evaluated through the Framework. For some petitions, CDFW recommended an alternative pathway to achieving the desired outcome of the proposed change.

The DMR indicated the MPA Network is meeting expectations and functioning effectively to achieve the goals of the MLPA. 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.

This evaluation is not the only process by which regulatory changes have been considered as part of the adaptive management of the MPA Network. Since implementation of California's MPA Network, targeted legislative and regulatory refinements have been identified to align MPAs with their original intent, clarify or correct provisions, or address priority management and enforcement issues. Since 2013, four legislative amendments and seven regulatory packages have been enacted to strengthen and support the adaptive management of the MPA Network and Management Program. The regulatory amendments:

- 2014 – Clarified and corrected provisions, including general provisions, definitions, take, and boundaries
- 2015 – Clarified and corrected provisions, including general provisions, definitions, take, and boundaries. This includes refining and correcting boundary coordinates for 106 MPAs.
- 2016 – Added provisions for tribal take in north coast MPAs
- 2018 – Repealed a special closure due to conflict with private property

Attachment I: Companion Document

- 2018 – Added provisions for tribal take in south coast MPAs and amended boundaries to better align with historical subsistence and cultural use
- 2022 – Cleaned up State Marine Recreational Management Area language
- 2023 – Provided a mechanism for operation and maintenance of pre-existing artificial structures in MPAs

The legislative amendments include Senate Bill 96 (2013), Assembly Bill 298 (2015), Assembly Bill 2369 (2018), and Assembly Bill 63 (2021). See [Appendix G of the Decadal Management Review](#) for more information about regulatory packages and legislative amendments that apply to MPA Network management implemented since 2012. All amendments were deliberately and carefully constructed to preserve the integrity of the MPA Network.

The Department remains committed to adaptive management through regulatory and non-regulatory pathways and will continue to work with tribes and partners to advance the recommendations of the DMR through a science-based inclusive statewide process consistent with the requirements of the MLPA and MPA Master Plan.

SUPPLEMENTAL EVALUATION INFORMATION

CDFW compiled supplemental information and additional context for the Tribally-led petitions, the responses to Evaluation Questions 1, 2a, 9, 10a, and 14, and Section V. Supplemental Analyses, Data and Information, And Citations. CFGC staff conducted the analysis and prepared the responses for Questions 16 and 17 and provided additional context for their evaluations below. The information provided here was common across the evaluations and is included here to prevent having to repeat it in each evaluation.

TRIBALLY-LED PETITIONS

This Companion Document includes a summary of the process for identifying Tribally-led petitions, CDFW's outreach to all California Native American tribes throughout the petitions process, and a summary of outreach and engagement with Tribally-led petitioners (Attachment A below). As directed by CFGC, CDFW evaluated the Tribally-led petitions with the CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework. Tribally-led petitions, per CFGC direction, will next be discussed at the April 14, 2026, CFGC Tribal Committee Meeting. *Note: 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.*

The following petitions were identified by CFGC as Tribally-led petitions:

- Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation: Remove Recreational Take of Smelt and Change the Boundary at Pyramid Point SMCA (2023-21MPA)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (SYBCI): Designate a new Chitqawi SMCA in Morro Bay with a Tribal Exemption for SYBCI (2023-19MPA)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Change the Take and Add a Tribal Exemption at Point Buchon SMCA, Change the Boundary at Point Buchon SMR (2023-20MPA)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Designate a new SMCA near Mishopshno/Carpinteria with a Tribal Exemption for SYBCI (2023-29MPA)
- Northern Chumash Tribal Council: Designate a new SMCA at Point Sal (Santa Barbara Co.) With Allowance for Recreational Take of Finfish by Hook and Line From Shore (2023-28MPA)

Summary of Tribal Outreach and Engagement with California Native American Tribes for the 2023 MPA Petitions

In late 2023, CFGC received 20 petitions from California Native American tribes (tribes) and the public requesting changes to California's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network. The CFGC referred the 2023 MPA Petitions to CDFW to evaluate in early 2024. This document provides a summary of tribal outreach and engagement with California Native Tribes for the 20 MPA petitions, including five Tribally-led petitions, proposing approximately 70 changes to the MPA regulations for MPAs from southern California to the Oregon border (2023 MPA petitions).

Summary of CDFW tribal outreach for all 2023 MPA petitions

Since receiving the petitions, CDFW has provided regular updates on the status of the 2023 MPA petitions and petition evaluation process through email communications and mailed letters to the CDFW tribal contact list. The CDFW tribal contact list includes over 400 individuals across the state who represent and/or work for a California Native American tribe. The statewide list is maintained by CDFW's Tribal Liaison and includes people on the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) contact list and others who have elected to receive updates from CDFW related to tribes. These updates included offers for consultation and meetings between tribes and CDFW. In October 2025, CFGC and CDFW sent letters via email and postal mail to the CDFW tribal contact list to specifically offer formal consultation or informal meetings on the 2023 MPA Petitions. CDFW also presented written and verbal updates at meetings of the CFGC's Tribal Committee. These outreach efforts to tribes are summarized in Table 1.

Summary of additional outreach and engagement with tribes for Tribally-led petitions

At the August 12, 2025, CFGC's Tribal Committee meeting, the Tribal Committee identified four of the 2023 MPA petitions as Tribally-led petitions, which are petitions that were submitted by a tribe, representative designated by a tribe, or tribal organization, or have a tribal co-sponsor. These included:

- 2023-19MPA submitted by Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- 2023-20MPA submitted by Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- 2023-21MPA submitted by Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
- 2023-29MPA submitted by Natural Resource Defense Council and co-sponsored by Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians

At the May 7, 2025, meeting, the Tribal Committee requested CDFW send additional offers to all tribes for consultation on the remaining 2023 MPA Petitions and to reach out to offer to meet with tribes associated with the Tribally-led petitions.

On October 16, 2025, CDFW distributed to the CDFW statewide tribal contact list a letter offering joint tribal consultation with CDFW and CFGC on any 2023 MPA petition. This letter was also included in the fall quarterly CDFW Tribal Updates email.

On November 24, 2025, CFGC received a letter from Northern Chumash Tribal Council and Natural Resources Defense Council indicating that Northern Chumash Tribal Council was a formal co-sponsor for petition 2023-28MPA, and requested CFGC consider the petition a Tribally-led petition.

At the December 9, 2025, Tribal Committee Meeting, the Tribal Committee reconsidered this petition and recommended CFGC designate it as a Tribally-led petition. At the December 11, 2025, CFGC Meeting, CFGC designated petition 2023-28MPA as a Tribally-led petition.

At the February 11, 2026, CFGC meeting, CFGC approved the addition of an update and discussion on the Tribally-led petitions at the April 14, 2026, Tribal Committee Meeting.

Between September 2025 and February 2026, CDFW participated in several discussions with representatives of tribes regarding the Tribally-led petitions.

Attachment I: Companion Document

Table 1. Summary of CDFW tribal outreach and engagement to-date related to the 2023 MPA petitions and petition process, including communication method and type of content. Unless otherwise specified, all tribal outreach communications included tribes listed on the CDFW tribal contact list maintained by CDFW’s Department Tribal Liaison, which includes 400 people from the NAHC Contact List and additional tribal representatives.

Date	Method	Content
5/31/2024	Email	Released Blog Post: Seeking Your Feedback to Help Manage California’s Marine Protected Area Network
10/4/2024	Email	CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update: Background, DMR petition process, next steps, upcoming meetings
10/25/2024	Email	Released Blog Post: MPA Day
11/22/2024	Email	CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update: Background, DMR petition process, next steps, upcoming meetings
4/11/2025	Email	CDFW Tribal Liaison provided Department update email, including CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update
5/7/2025	Tribal Committee: Meeting Materials	Written Informational Update: California’s Marine Protected Area Network Decadal Management Review and Subsequent Marine Protected Area Regulation Amendment Petition Process (pg. 99 of 129) Verbal update on the 2023 MPA petitions and draft evaluation framework by Susan Ashcraft, Commission Marine Advisor
8/14/2025	Tribal Committee: Meeting Presentation	Presentation by Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager, on 2023 MPA petitions and draft evaluation framework. Tribal Committee identified four Tribally-led petitions.
9/2025	Email	CDFW invitation to meet to discuss petitions sent to petitioners for the four Tribally-led petitions
10/16/2025	Mail	Invitation Letter for joint tribal consultation with CDFW and CFGC on any 2023 MPA petition
10/17/2025	Email	CDFW Tribal Liaison - Department update email, including CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update and Invitation Letter for Joint Tribal Consultation
10/20/2025 – 2/27/26	Meetings	Discuss Tribally-led petitions with tribal petitioners

CDFW 2023 MPA BIN 2 PETITION EVALUATION

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

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?

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 such, CDFW has evaluated the proposed actions 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.

MLPA Goals

1. Protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function and integrity of marine ecosystems.
2. Help sustain, conserve and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.
3. Improve recreational, educational and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbance, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.
4. Protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in CA waters for their intrinsic values.
5. Ensure California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures and adequate enforcement and are based in sound science guidelines.
6. Ensure the State's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a network.

Master Plan Adaptive Management Objectives

- Protect the structure and function of marine ecosystems
- Improve native marine life populations, including those of economic value
- Ensure minimal disturbance while allowing for sustainable opportunities for recreation, education and research
- Ensure comprehensive representation of all key habitats, including unique habitats

Attachment I: Companion Document

- Use learning acquired through administration of the MPA Management Program to adaptively manage the objectives, management measures, enforcement efforts, and scientific guidelines to inform management decisions
- MPAs function as a cohesive statewide network

Question 2a: Does the proposed change advance adaptive management recommendations in the Decadal Management Review?

[Decadal Management Review](#)

[Adaptive Management Recommendations](#)

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?

To ensure consistency across petition evaluations, CDFW developed a decision tree to evaluate if a proposed action would improve individual MPA or MPA Network design and/or improve alignment with the Science Guidelines (Figure 1). The decision tree includes considerations such as whether the proposed change has the potential to affect the MPA's size or level of protection and other questions to respond to the question. The Science Guidelines were developed by the Science Advisory Team during the MLPA Initiative planning process to provide quantitative, science-based guidance for achieving network-scale ecological objectives (e.g., North Coast Study Region guidance [Executive Summary from the North Coast SAT Methods Used to Evaluate MPA Proposals](#)). While there were slight deviations between planning regions in the amount of individual habitat types necessary to meet habitat representation and replication targets, key design elements were consistent statewide. In particular, MPAs intended to contribute to ecological goals were required to be at least 9 square miles in size and meet one of the three highest levels of protection (Very High, High, or Moderate-High).

Attachment I: Companion Document

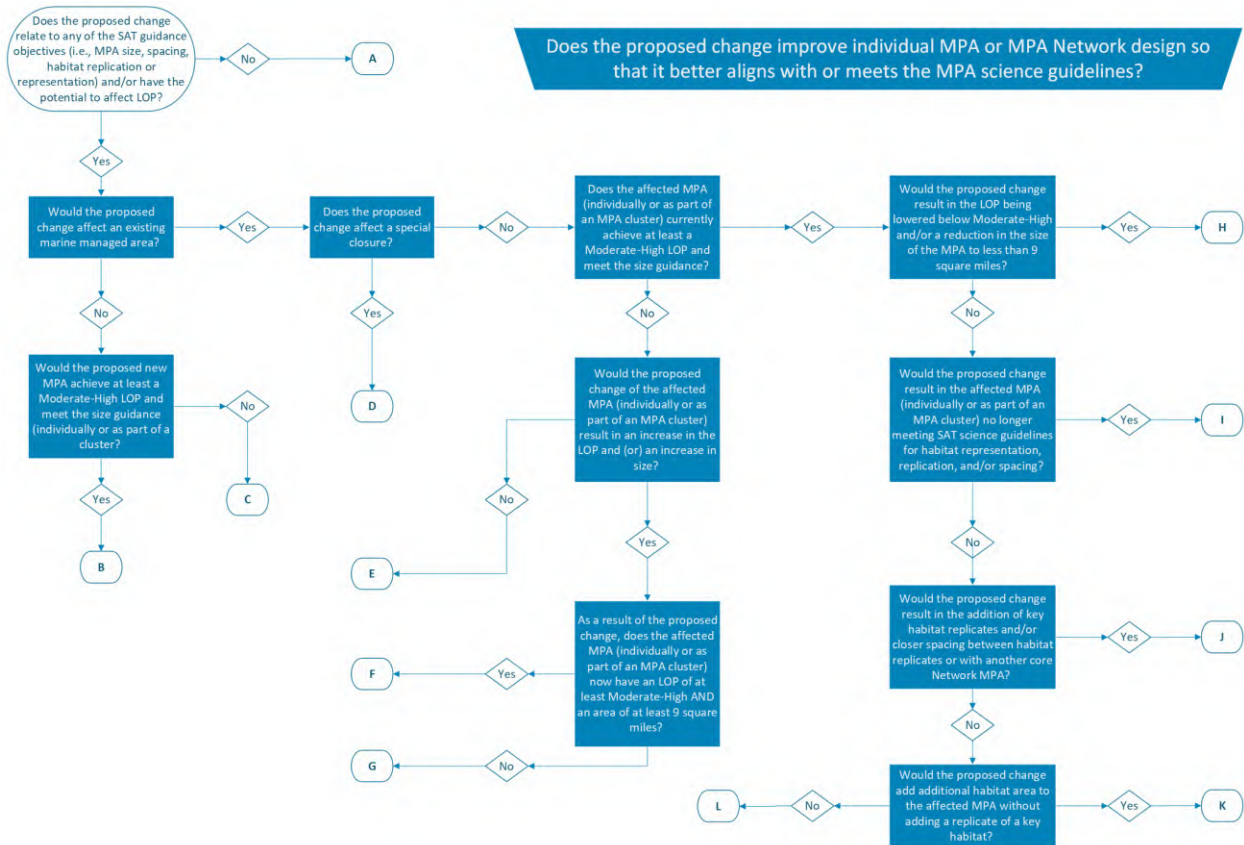


Figure 1. Decision tree framework used to formulate responses for Question 9 for each proposed action. The starting point, at the upper left corner, is based on whether the proposed change has the potential to affect the MPA’s size or level of protection. The rest of the questions help to identify the effects such a change may have on the design of the individual MPA and the MPA Network. Based on this decision tree, the effects of a proposed action were determined to belong to one of the following groups:

- A. Not applicable because the proposed action does not affect MPA size or LOP. Proposed action does not improve the design of the individual MPA or the MPA Network, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- B. New MPA meets minimum size and LOP requirements. Proposed action would improve Network design and enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- C. New MPA does not meet minimum size and/or LOP requirement. Proposed action does not improve Network design, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- D. Not applicable because the Science Guidelines do not apply to special closures. Proposed action does not improve Network design, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.

Attachment I: Companion Document

- E. Neither existing MPA nor as proposed meets minimum size and/or LOP requirement. Proposed action does not improve the design of the individual MPA or the MPA Network, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- F. Existing MPA does not meet minimum size and/or LOP requirement, but would meet both as proposed. Proposed action improves the design of the individual MPA and the MPA Network, and enhances alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- G. Existing MPA does not meet minimum size and/or LOP requirement. Proposed change improves individual MPA design, but does not improve MPA Network design or enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- H. Existing MPA meets minimum size and LOP requirements, but no longer would as proposed. Proposed action does not improve the design of the individual MPA or the MPA Network, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- I. Existing MPA meets minimum size and LOP requirements. MPA as proposed meets both criteria but no longer meets one or more Science Guidelines. Proposed action does not improve the design of the individual MPA or the MPA Network, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- J. Existing MPA meets minimum size and LOP requirements. Proposed action results in meeting additional Science Guideline(s). Proposed action improves design of individual MPA and MPA Network, and enhances alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- K. Existing MPA meets minimum size and LOP requirements. Proposed action increases the amount of habitat(s) protected but additional Science Guidelines are not met. Proposed action improves the design of the individual MPA but not of the MPA Network, and does not enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.
- L. Both existing MPA and as proposed meet minimum size and LOP requirements. Proposed action does not improve the design of the individual MPA or the MPA Network, nor does it enhance alignment with the Science Guidelines.

Question 10a: Does the proposed change align with CDFW Feasibility Guidelines?

[CDFW Feasibility Guidelines](#)

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?

CDFW is committed to improving access to marine resources in California for traditionally underserved and marginalized communities. This question was included in the evaluation framework because of that commitment, as well as input from partners to prioritize improvement of accessibility and recommendations from the Decadal Management Review (DMR) to integrate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

Attachment I: Companion Document

principles into MPA management. However, after exploration of the available information and methods that could be used to address this question for each proposed action, CDFW determined that providing the level of evaluation this question and the relevant communities deserve was not possible within the scope of the petition evaluations. Most of the petitions did not include sufficient information to accurately assess benefits and/or impacts to historically marginalized and underserved communities. Additional details and outreach are needed by petitioners to support this portion of the analysis.

Additionally, in evaluating this question, CDFW reviewed multiple information sources, and found there are many different approaches to defining and identifying “traditionally underserved or marginalized communities.” CDFW reviewed the definition of disadvantaged communities (DACs) in Senate Bill 535; which is based on pollution burden and federally recognized tribal status (a map of DACs per this definition is [available here](#), data used to determine community status is available through the [CalEnviroScreen tool](#)). Using excess pollution burden to define and identify disadvantaged communities has some applicability to the MPA Network, such as concerns related to water quality. However, it did not seem like the most appropriate approach for defining and identifying “traditionally underserved or marginalized communities” or evaluating issues related to accessing fishing, recreation, or educational opportunities in the context of the MPA Network.

CDFW considered the definition of DACs utilized by the California Department of Water Resources, where DACs are areas where median annual household income is 80% or less of the statewide median annual household income ([a map of those communities is available here](#)). However, when examined spatially, this definition covers much of the area of the state, making it difficult to identify discrete communities.

CDFW found the data and information in the California Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation’s [Vulnerable Communities Platform](#) would likely be the best to help understand access issues related to the MPA Network. The Vulnerable Communities Platform provides information on more specific and potentially applicable metrics, such as food insecurity and linguistic isolation, which could be used to better understand access issues (e.g., subsistence fishing, language access for outreach materials, [individual indicators data is available here](#)). However, using this information would require a determination of the most appropriate criteria to identify objective thresholds to define traditionally underserved or marginalized communities.

Given that lack of sufficient information on benefits to historically marginalized and underserved communities in the petitions as filed, CDFW will continue to work with tribes and other partners on a broader approach outside of the narrow scope of this petition process to assess access and equity issues across the entire MPA Network. This

Attachment I: Companion Document

includes working on DMR Recommendation 8, to “Evaluate the accessibility of MPAs to various community groups.” Through this separate process, CDFW could work collaboratively with communities and partners, including to align on:

- A definition of “traditionally underserved or marginalized communities” in the context of the MPA Network or access to marine resources, developed with and for communities,
- Barriers to access experienced by these communities related to access to marine resources and/or MPAs, and
- Methods by which those barriers may be mitigated.

Question 16: Is the proposed change consistent with the CFGC Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy?

California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) staff conducted this analysis and prepared the response to Question 16.

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Overview

The California Fish and Game Commission’s (CFGC) Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy ([JEDI Policy](#)) reflects CFGC’s deep commitment and responsibility to support safe and equitable access to California’s thriving native wildlife and natural habitats, supported by inclusive decision-making that reflects the needs and values of the state’s diverse communities. The policy acknowledges the significant past injustices experienced by historically marginalized and underserved communities and seeks to correct the burdens these communities have faced in accessing nature, participating in regulatory decision-making, and the privilege often associated with outdoor access. The JEDI Policy also considers and seeks to correct the disproportionate burdens on California Native American tribes and recognizes their interwoven stewardship relationships with the environment.

The JEDI Policy identifies 13 individual commitments referred to as “actions” that guide how CFGC advances its JEDI commitments. Implementation of the policy has been an ongoing priority of CFGC since its adoption in February 2022 and CFGC staff are continuing to explore meaningful ways to meet its commitments. Inclusion of the JEDI Policy in the evaluation framework was intended to highlight this commitment.

Evaluation of MPA Petitions

Evaluating MPA petitions for their consistency with CFGC’s JEDI Policy marked the first time CFGC staff attempted to systematically apply the policy’s principles to inform CFGC decision-making. Through the process of evaluating MPA petitions against the JEDI Policy, CFGC staff found it was unable to make determinations about whether, or to

Attachment I: Companion Document

what extent, any specific petition advances or conflicts with the JEDI Policy. The findings are described in detail here, along with next steps to resolve these limitations moving forward.

CFGC staff reviewed the pending MPA petitions to identify conceptual intersections with JEDI principles. Of the 13 commitments in the policy, 7 are not relevant to the evaluation because they focus on internal operations, partnerships, and governance processes. The remaining 6 are directly applicable to the MPA petitions:

- Considering and correcting for disproportionate burdens on historically marginalized communities,
- Improving responsiveness to the needs of marginalized fish and wildlife users;
- Amplifying tribal voices and issues,
- Considering the implications of decisions on subsistence activities,
- Improving and championing safe and equitable access to abundant and healthy fish and wildlife populations, and
- Promoting cultural, community, and economic opportunities related to fish and wildlife that CFGC regulates.

In seeking to apply the six applicable commitments, staff identified several knowledge gaps that limited its ability to provide consistent or objective petition-level JEDI determinations. Ultimately, CFGC staff concluded that there is insufficient information available to meaningfully assess potential JEDI-related implications of petitions in a manner that reflects the intent of the policy.

Key concepts such as subsistence activities, equitable access to abundant fish and wildlife populations, and cultural, community and economic opportunities do not have Commission-adopted definitions, metrics, or measurable criteria. Without clearly articulated definitions, datasets, or rubrics, petition-specific JEDI assessments would be inherently speculative. Staff has, however, gained a clearer understanding of these gaps, which will be important to address in future policy implementation.

Tribally-Led Petitions

One area that CFGC has already recognized is the distinct role of petitions that amplify tribal voices, which is reflected in how CFGC has grouped these petitions for discussion. Five petitions were submitted either by a tribe or with tribal participation as co-sponsors for petitions submitted by non-tribal proponents; CFGC has grouped these as “Tribally-led,” which includes tribally cosponsored petitions. Some of these petitions advance tribally identified MPA names and, in some cases, include recommendations related to pursuing co-management or co-stewardship. Collectively, they reflect the

Attachment I: Companion Document

interests of federally recognized tribes as well as non-federally recognized tribal communities with enduring relationships to California's coast. Many of these proposals have the potential to foster long-term partnerships or shared leadership with California Native American tribes, which are considered marginalized and/or underserved communities, supporting the broader intent of CFGC's JEDI Policy.

Petitioner Intent

CFGC staff acknowledges that several petitions explicitly reference, within their petition rationale(s), goals related to equitable access, subsistence activities, long-term abundance of fish and wildlife, or other JEDI-related intentions. While the stated intentions are important context, the previously-described evaluation limitations prevent staff from assessing the degree to which these intentions may achieve the goals. CFGC staff acknowledges that changes to harvest or non-consumptive access may relate to subsistence or equity considerations, but cannot reliably characterize the nature or extent of those relationships without risking over-generalization or speculation.

Current and Future Focus

In the absence of the tools needed for petition-level JEDI analysis, and because many JEDI commitments were intended primarily to guide CFGC processes, CFGC staff has begun to focus on the overall petition process, including planning for regional MPA petition meetings. CFGC staff efforts have included: consulting with partners to inform development of approaches to support safe and inclusive participation; selecting meeting locations near affected communities to reduce travel barriers; elevating tribal voices; increasing transparency about meeting format and expectations; and exploring additional ways to provide accessible engagement opportunities. The regional meetings are an opportunity for CFGC to engage with local communities regarding MPA petitions. Proposals that reflect community knowledge, lived experience, and local needs align more closely with the inclusive decision-making envisioned by the JEDI Policy. Public comments emphasizing the level of community engagement, or lack thereof, were not considered when conducting the petition evaluations.

Evaluation of the MPA petitions has highlighted critical next steps needed to strengthen CFGC's ability to apply the JEDI Policy in future evaluations. Consistent with the intent of Recommendation 8 in CDFW's Marine Protected Area Network Decadal Management Review — a mid-term priority focused on evaluating the accessibility of MPAs to various community groups — staff recognizes that broader collaborative efforts with various partners will be needed to establish the foundational elements for integrating JEDI considerations across the MPA Network. Advancing this work will support both the

Attachment I: Companion Document

CFGC's JEDI Policy goals and more meaningful future evaluations, beyond what is possible within the limited scope of this petition process.

Links

JEDI Policy: [California Fish and Game Commission Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, approved February 16, 2022](#)

JEDI Policy Definitions: [California Fish and Game Commission JEDI Definitions](#)

Question 17: Is the proposed change consistent with the CFGC Coastal Fishing Communities Policy?

CFGC staff conducted this analysis and prepared the responses to Question 17 for the proposed actions in the evaluations. CFGC staff provided this additional context for their evaluations of Question 17.

Coastal Fishing Communities Policy Overview

The CFGC Coastal Fishing Communities (CFC) Policy guides CFGC, in partnership with CDFW, in supporting the long-term needs, social well-being, and economic health of California's coastal fishing communities while upholding the conservation and management goals central to both agencies' missions and mandates. The CFC Policy defines coastal fishing communities broadly as: (a) social, cultural, economic, and/or place-based groups whose members are dependent upon, engaged in, or benefit from local, wild-capture, commercial, recreational, or subsistence marine harvest or processing to meet the social and economic needs of the community; (b) include, but are not limited to, the businesses and organizations that depend upon or support those activities; and (c) may be a subset or member of larger or associated coastal communities. Adopted in February 2024, the CFC Policy formalizes a vision for how CFGC engages with fishing communities, incorporates their needs into decision-making, and contributes to their resilience.

Evaluation of MPA Petitions

Evaluating MPA petitions for their consistency with CFGC's CFC Policy marked the first time CFGC staff has attempted to apply the policy's principles to inform CFGC decision-making. Through the process of evaluating MPA petitions against the policy, CFGC staff found it was unable to make determinations about whether, or to what extent, any specific petition advances or conflicts with the goals of the CFC Policy. The findings are described in detail here, along with next steps to resolve these limitations moving forward.

Attachment I: Companion Document

The goal of Question 17 is to identify where petitioned actions may conceptually intersect with the CFC Policy—not to evaluate biological outcomes addressed elsewhere in the petition evaluation framework or provide a full socioeconomic analysis.

As CFGC staff applied the CFC Policy to each petition and its proposed actions, it became clear that only limited information is currently available to assess potential implications for coastal fishing communities. The policy encompasses broad aims, such as maintaining or enhancing fishing opportunities, supporting community resilience and adaptive capacity, and ensuring coastal fishing community interests are meaningfully factored into CFGC decision-making.

However, CFGC does not yet have detailed economic, demographic, or cultural data to determine how proposed regulatory changes may affect specific coastal fishing communities. Existing statewide information—primarily the Ocean Sport Fishing web application and community profiles from FishingCommunities.net, last updated in 2023 using 2021 data—provides useful general context on ports, landings, and community characteristics. CFGC staff expertise and experience also contributed to the understanding of impacts of petitioned actions on nearby coastal fishing communities. These sources of information do not provide the level of resolution necessary to draw conclusions about individual community dependence, vulnerability, or long-term resilience.

Given the limitations, CFGC staff focused the evaluation on three elements that could be consistently and objectively applied across all petitions:

- Describes the nature of the proposed regulatory change,
- Identifies whether a petition action would increase, decrease, or have no direct effect on commercial or recreational fishing opportunity within or near the affected MPA, and
- Identifies the coastal fishing communities most geographically-proximate to the affected area, by identifying the nearest ports or harbors and travel distance between them, although these do not necessarily reflect smaller coastal fishing communities that may be affected.

Some petition actions were given “not applicable” responses, reflecting that those actions are not subject to evaluation as they are either not regulatory change requests or they are proposals outside of the regulatory framework for MPA management.

Some petitions propose increasing fishing opportunities, which could conceptually support short- or long-term community resilience within the context of California’s existing fishing regulations and the broader fisheries management goals, and other petitions propose strengthening or expanding MPAs, which may confer long-term

Attachment I: Companion Document

ecological benefits that indirectly support fishing communities. However, CFGC staff cannot evaluate the proposed changes on biological, stock-related, or long-term effects relative to supporting fishing opportunities under this question.

A full understanding of potential benefits or impacts to coastal fishing communities requires meaningful input from the community members themselves—commercial, recreational, and subsistence harvesters, as well as the businesses and organizations that support local fishing economies. CFGC staff view this evaluation as an initial step based on the information currently available, and not as a comprehensive assessment of the lived experience, priorities, or needs of individual communities. Public comments that provide such feedback have not been directly considered in the evaluation. While CFGC has received a wealth of public comments to inform its understanding of the range of views thus far, CFGC’s upcoming regional MPA petition review meetings will provide an important opportunity for commenters to further supplement CFGC staff’s analysis with direct feedback from those most connected to the affected areas. Continued dialogue with coastal fishing communities will help strengthen the foundation for applying the CFC Policy in future decision-making and improve CFGC’s ability to better understand and support the adaptive capacity and long-term resilience of California’s fishing communities over time.

Possible next steps in policy implementation and pathways to begin filling data gaps is anticipated for discussion at a future CFGC Marine Resources Committee meeting. This discussion ideally would lead to developing options and needs to enable integrating consideration of the CFC policy into CFGC’s decision-making.

Links

CFC Policy: [California Fish and Game Commission Coastal Fishing Communities Policy](#), adopted February 14, 2024 (also included on the following page)

Current Regulations Map: [Ocean Sport Fishing Web App](#)

Partner website, California Fishing Communities, providing profiles of the history, economics, and culture of California’s fishing communities (last updated in 2023 with 2021 data): [FishingCommunities.net](#)

SUMMARY OF OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

After completing the evaluations, none of the petition evaluations had information to include in this section beyond what was provided in the other five sections of the evaluation. Consequently, this section was removed from the evaluations.

2023 BIN 2 MPA PETITIONS

Evaluations and Recommendations for Non-Tribally Led Petitions

Dr. Craig Shuman, Marine Regional Manager
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

April 15, 2026



Marine Life Protection Act

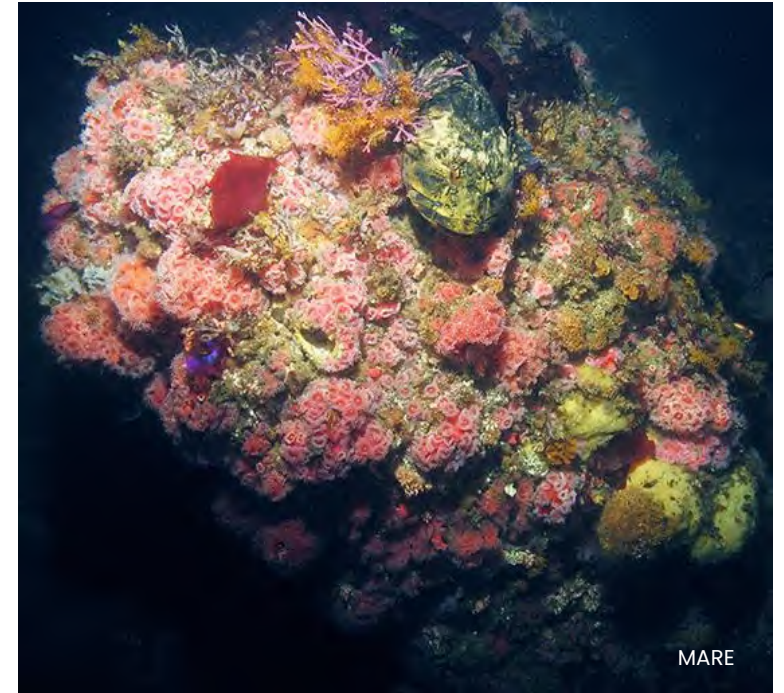
- Landmark legislation passed in 1999
- “California’s MPAs were established on a piecemeal basis rather than according to a coherent plan and sound scientific guidelines...creates the illusion of protection...”
FGC §2851 (a)
- Six MLPA Goals Fish & Game Code section 2853(b)
- Two unsuccessful attempts to implement in 2001 and 2002



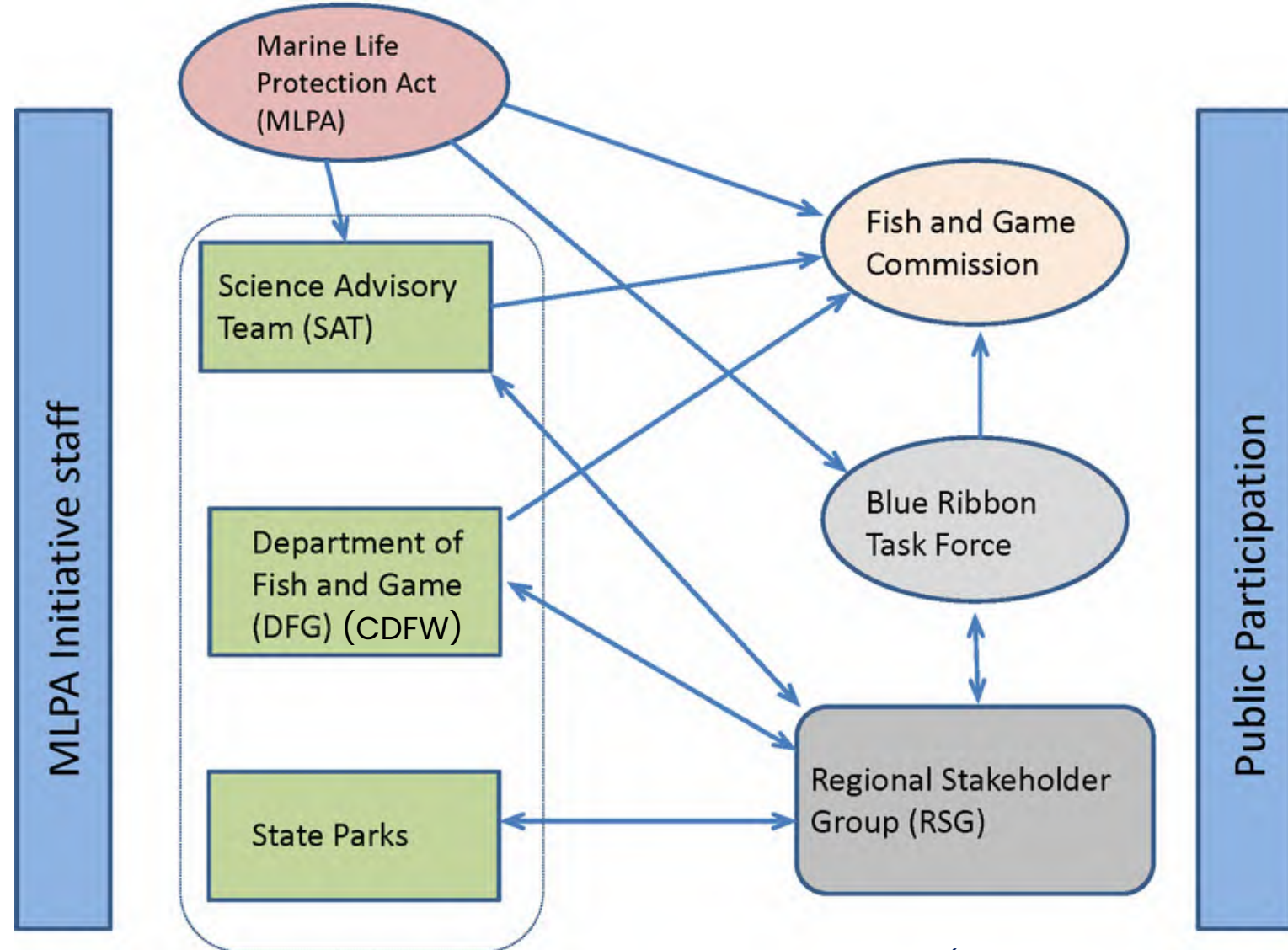
Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

Public-Private Partnership formed in 2004

- Central Coast: 2005-2006
- North Central Coast: 2007-2008
- South Coast: 2008-2009
- North Coast: 2009-2011



Marine Life Protection Act Initiative (cont.)



(Cravens and Ardoin 2016)

Importance of Iteration

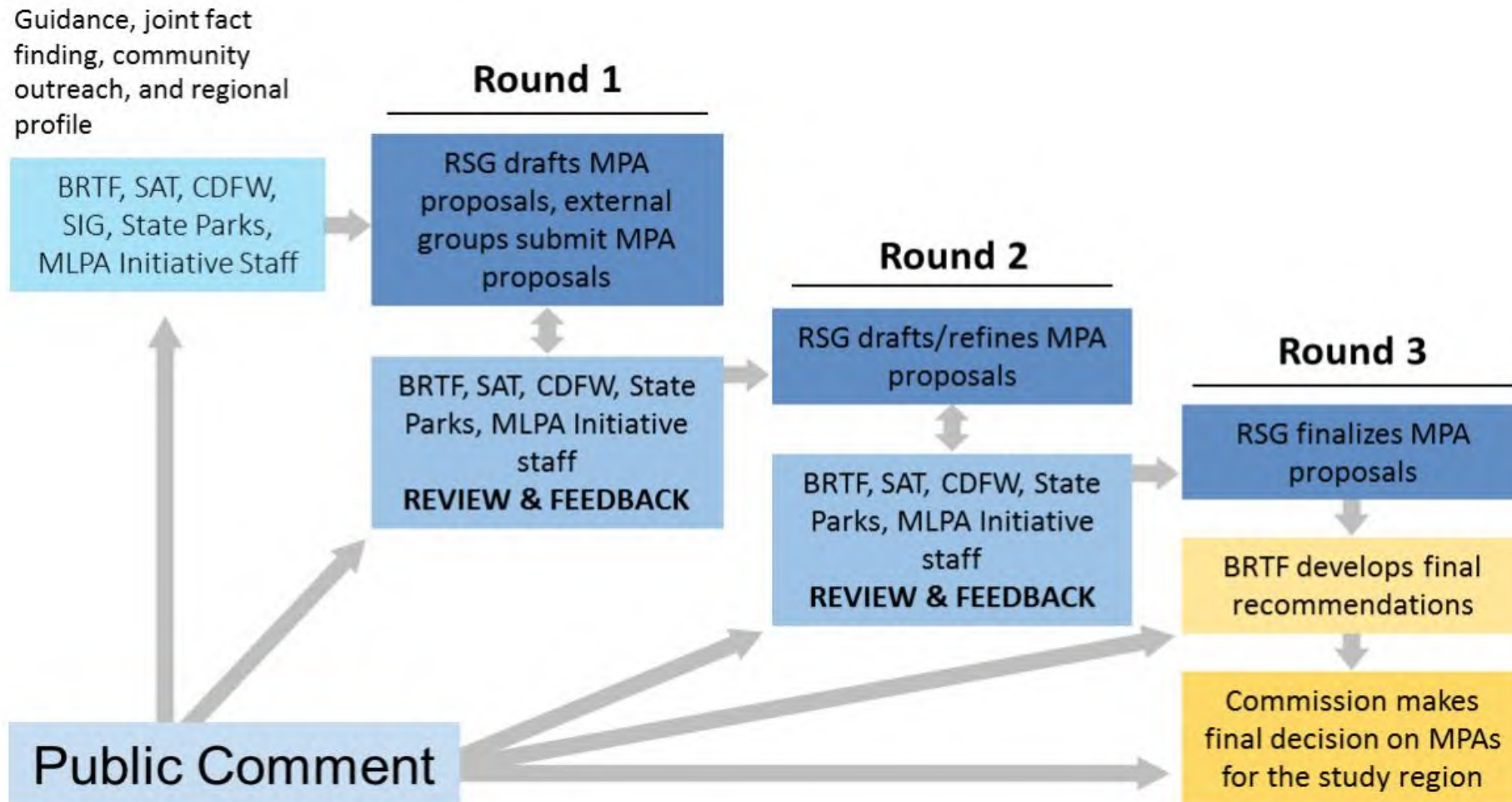
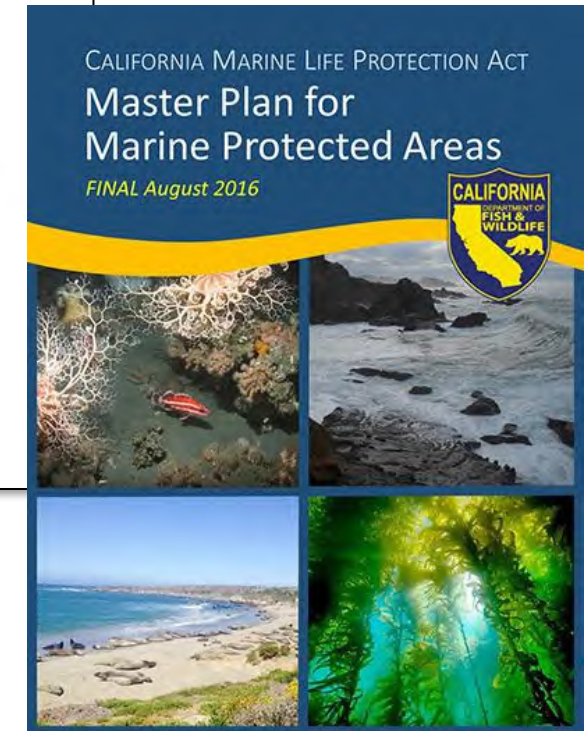
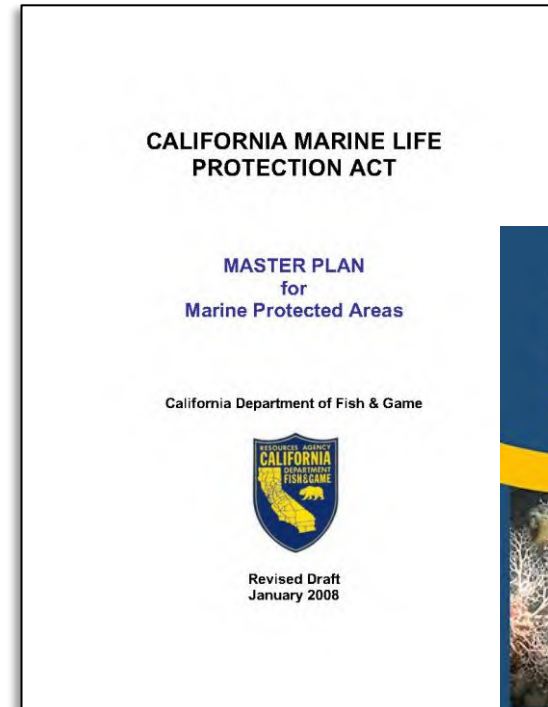


Figure 5. General process used by the MLPA Initiative to develop alternative MPA proposals in each regional MPA planning process or planning region.

Adaptive Management of the MPA Network

Master Plan for MPAs:

- 2008
- 2016
 - Outreach and Education
 - Research and Monitoring
 - Enforcement and Compliance
 - Policy and Permitting



Regional Management Reviews

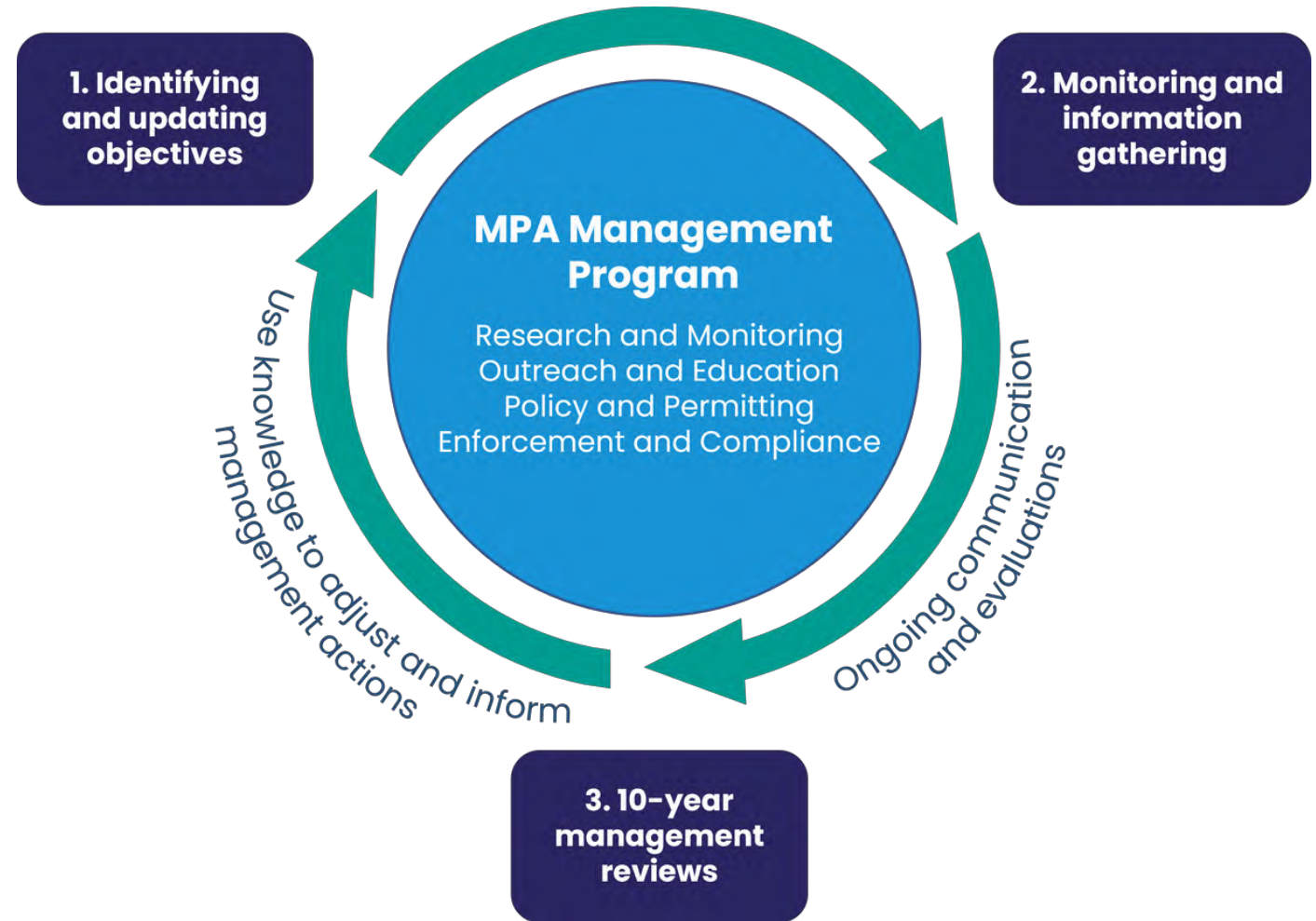
- Channel Islands: 2008
- Central Coast: 2013
- North Central Coast: 2015
- South Coast: 2017
- North Coast: 2018



MPA Network Management

Adaptive Process

- Long-term scientific monitoring
- Periodic Review: data expertly evaluated
- Ongoing, across all Management Pillars
 - Regulatory
 - Non-regulatory



Adaptive Management Regulatory Amendments

- 2014: Clean-up package*
- 2015: Clean-up package*
- 2016: Tribal take allowance
- 2018: Repeal of special closure due to private property issue
- 2018: Tribal take allowance, boundary modification
- 2022: SMRMA language clean-up
- 2023: Pre-existing structures

* General provisions, definitions, take, boundaries

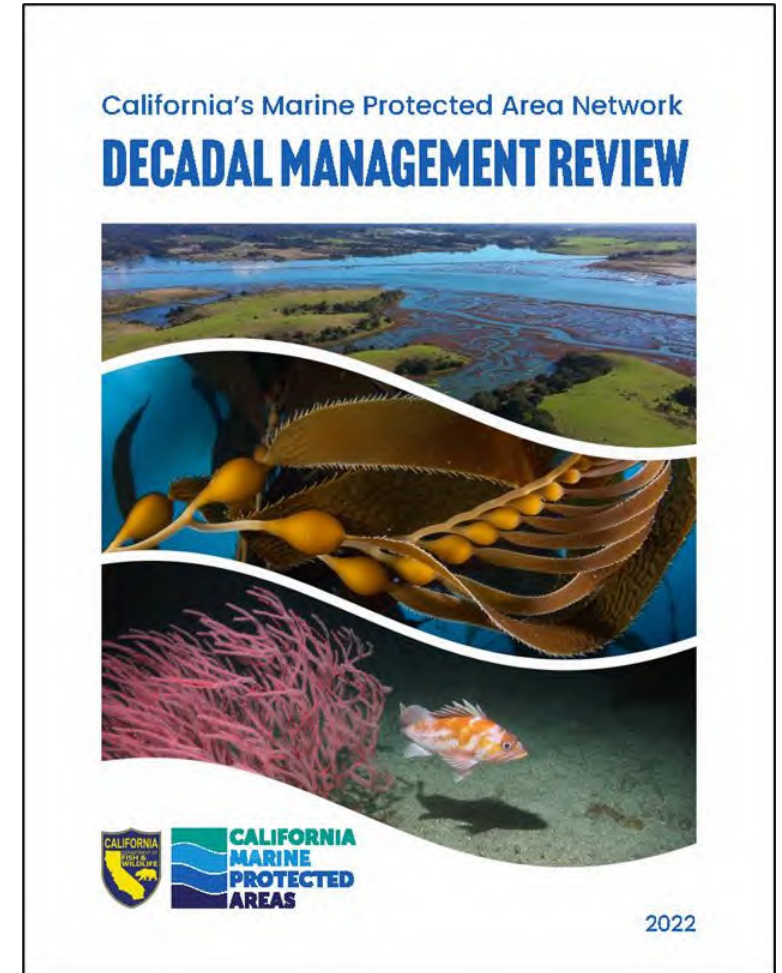


Amanda Van Diggelen CDFW



Decadal Management Review Key Findings

- For some species and habitats, MPAs support populations of larger and/or more abundant fish and invertebrates
 - Results vary across bioregions, habitats, and other factors
- Evidence of enhanced connectivity, ecosystem integrity, and resilience
 - MPA Network is still young, more to learn
- Did not identify performance gaps that warrant significant structural modification
- Informed 28 priority recommendations
 - ~80 specific actions



DMR Adaptive Management Recommendations

Near-Term (ongoing – 2 years)

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

Mid-Term (2 – 5 years)

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

Long-Term (5– 10 years)

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



2023 MPA Petition Process Milestones

Date	Milestone
Aug 2023	California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) approves prioritization framework and to <u>consider changes to the MPA Network using the existing CFGC petition process</u>
Oct 2023	CFGC releases “Overview of Process to Consider Potential Changes to California’s MPA Network”
Dec 2023	CFGC receives 20 MPA-related petitions with 80+ actions
Feb 2024	CFGC refers all 20 petitions to CDFW for evaluation
Apr 2024	CFGC adopts 3-phased approach to petition evaluation

2023 MPA Petition Process Milestones (2/3)

Date	Milestone
Aug 2024	CFGC approves binning petitions, requests CDFW evaluate Bin 1 petitions and develop a proposed framework to evaluate Bin 2 petitions
Nov 2024	CDFW releases recommendations for five Bin 1 petitions
Dec 2024	CFGC makes decisions on Bin 1 petitions and establishes March 14, 2025 deadline for amendments to Bin 2 petitions
Mar 2025	Deadline for amendments to Bin 2 petitions
Apr 2025	CFGC refers amended Bin 2 petitions to CDFW for evaluation
Apr-May 2025	CDFW develops Draft Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework with Ocean Protection Council and CFGC staff

2023 MPA Petition Process Milestones ^(3/3)


Date	Milestone
May 2025	Update and discussion at CFGC TC on Bin 2 MPA petitions and proposed approach for evaluations
Aug 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update and discussion on MPA petitions and Draft Eval Framework at CFGC TC• CFGC TC identifies four Tribally-led petitions• CFGC approves framework for evaluating Bin 2 petitions
Dec 2025	Update and discussion at CFGC TC on Bin 2 MPA petitions; identifies one more Tribally-led petition; directs CDFW to come back to April 2026 CFGC TC to discuss MPA Petitions
Mar 2026	CDFW releases evaluations and Companion Document for the ten non-Tribally-led Bin 2 MPA Petitions for the 64 proposed actions
Apr 2026	Update and discussion at CFGC TC on Bin 2 MPA petitions

2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework

CGFC Approved August 2025, includes:



- I. Petition Summary
- II. CDFW Recommendations with Brief Justifications
- III. Bin 2 Petition Grouping: Identify Tribally-led Petitions
- IV. CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Narrative and Evaluation
- V. Supplemental Analyses, Data and Information, and Citations

California Department of Fish and Wildlife's
Evaluation of 2023 Decadal Management Review Marine
Protected Area Petition:
**Modify Take in 9 SMCAs to Allow Commercial Take of Sea Urchins
(2023-14MPA)**



I. PETITION SUMMARY

CGFC Tracking Number	2023-14MPA
Petition Contact/Affiliation	David Goldenberg, Executive Director, California Sea Urchin Commission
Number of Proposed Actions	9
Affected MPAs	Sea Lion Cove, Stewarts Point, Salt Point, Double Cone Rock, Naples, Anacapa Island, Point Dume, Point Vicente, and Swami's State Marine Conservation Areas (SMCAs)
Petition Summary	Allow commercial take of sea urchins in 9 State Marine Conservation Areas
Link to StoryMap page	2023-14MPA

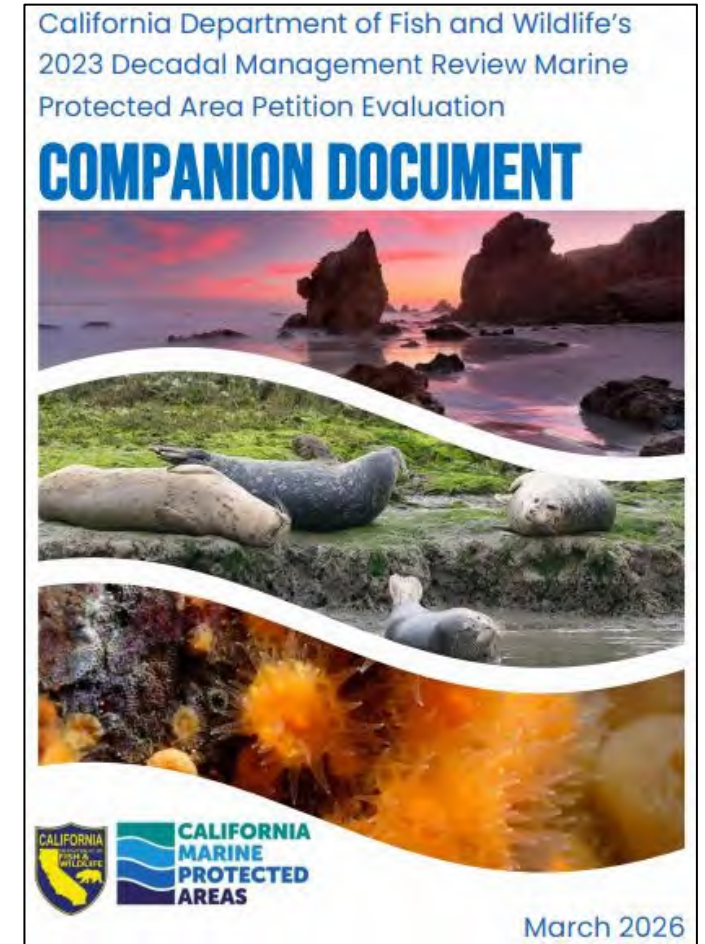


March 2026



2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Companion Document

- History of MPA Network Adaptive Management
- Summary of tribal outreach and engagement
- Supplemental information, reference materials, and additional context for evaluations



Tribally-led Petitions

- Submitted by a California Native American tribe, representative designated by a tribe or tribal organization, or has a tribal co-sponsor.
- CDFW update provided at the April 14th CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, go to <https://fgc.ca.gov/Meetings/2026> for more information.
- These five petitions (19, 20, 21, 28, and 29) are not included in this presentation.



Presentation Format

- **Petitions presented in numeric order**
- **Two Formats**
 - Single slide: petitions with a single proposed action or group of similar actions
 - Multiple slides: petitions with multiple proposed actions
- **Content**
 - Title of petition/proposed action(s)
 - Summary of proposed action(s)
 - Petitioner rationale
 - CDFW Recommendation



2023-14MPA: Modify Take in 9 SMCAs to Allow Commercial Take of Sea Urchin

9 Proposed Actions Affecting:

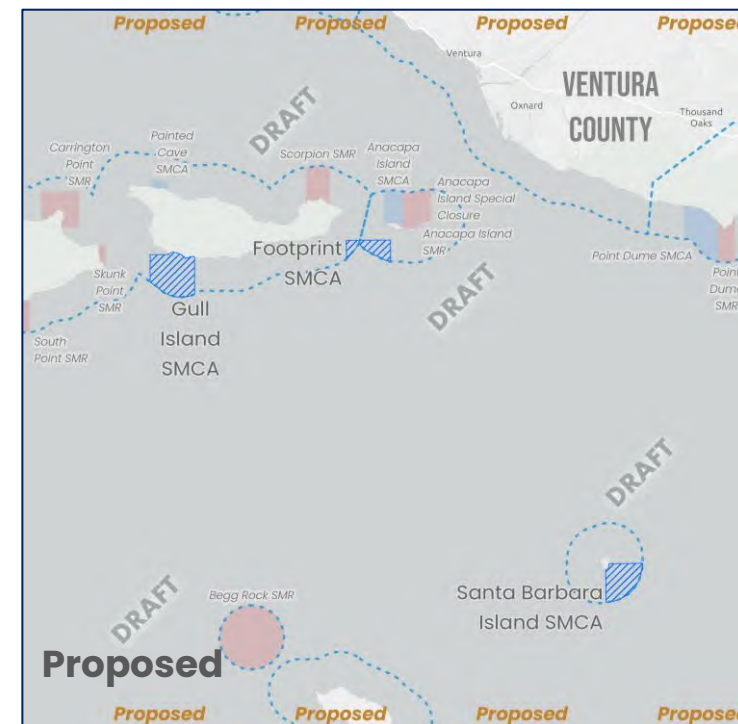
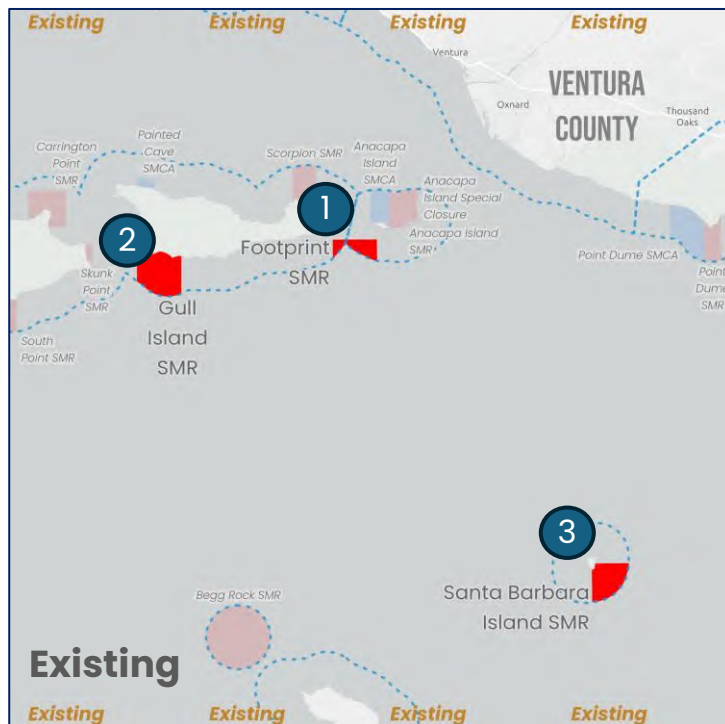
1. Sea Lion Cove SMCA
2. Stewarts Point SMCA
3. Salt Point SMCA
4. Double Cone Rock SMCA
5. Naples SMCA
6. Anacapa Island SMCA
7. Point Dume SMCA
8. Point Vicente No-take SMCA
9. Swami's SMCA



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-14MPA_1-9**

2023-15MPA_AM: Reclassify Footprint, Gull Island, and Santa Barbara Island SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Take of Highly Migratory Species.

3 Proposed Actions: Reclassify 1. Footprint, 2. Gull Island, and 3. Santa Barbara Island SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Take of Highly Migratory Species.



2023-15MPA_1-3_AM2: Reclassify Footprint, Gull Island, and Santa Barbara Island SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Take of Highly Migratory Species.

6 Petitioner Proposed Options:

Options	Recreational Take: Pelagic Finfish	Recreational Take: HMS	Commercial Take: Pelagic Finfish	Commercial Take: HMS	CPS
1	Hook and line, spear	N/A	Hook and line	N/A	N/A
2	N/A	Hook and line, spear	N/A	Hook and line	Possession
3	Hook and line, spear *no bottom contact	N/A	Hook and line *no bottom contact	N/A	N/A
4	N/A	Hook and line, spear *no bottom contact	N/A	Hook and line *no bottom contact	Possession
5	Spear	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	N/A	Spear	N/A	N/A	N/A



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-15MPA_1-3_AM2

2023-16MPA: Reclassify Stewarts Point and Bodega Head SMRs to SMCAs to Allow Commercial Salmon Trolling

2 Proposed Actions: Reclassify 1. Stewarts Point SMR and 2. Bodega Head SMR to SMCAs to Allow Commercial Salmon Trolling

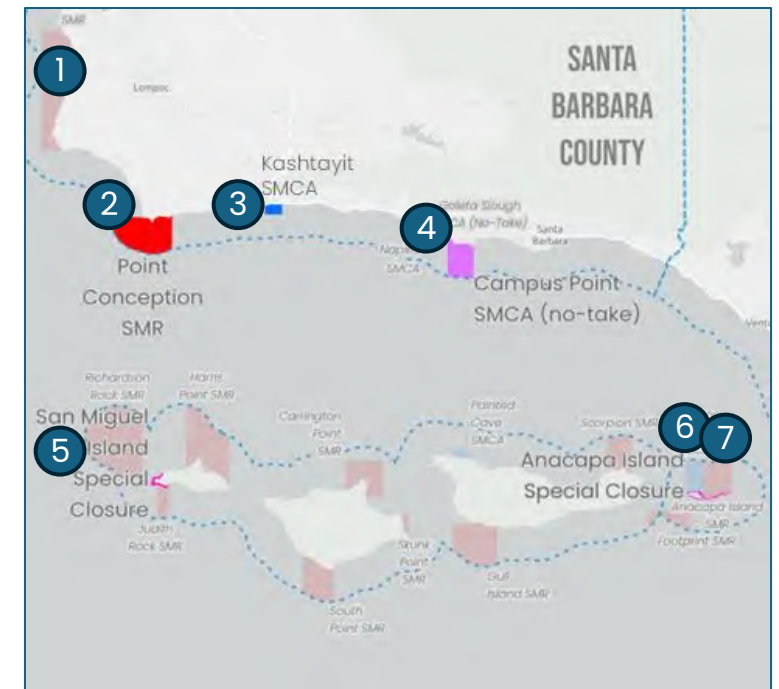


**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-16MPA_1-2**

2023-18MPA: Modify Allowed Uses at Several Santa Barbara Channel MPAs and Special Closures: Vandenberg SMR, Kashtayit SMCA, and San Miguel and Anacapa Island Special Closures

Summary of 7 Proposed Actions:

1. Allow recreational take of finfish from shore in Vandenberg SMR
(2022-04) Allow recreational fishing at Surf Beach within Vandenberg SMR
2. *Continue support of M2 Monitoring at Point Conception
3. Change take at Kashtayit SMCA
4. *Change color of No-take Campus Point SMCA from purple to red
- 5-7. Eliminate the San Miguel Special Closure and Anacapa Island Special Closure (Full Island), Reduce the size of the Anacapa Island Special Closure (Seasonal)



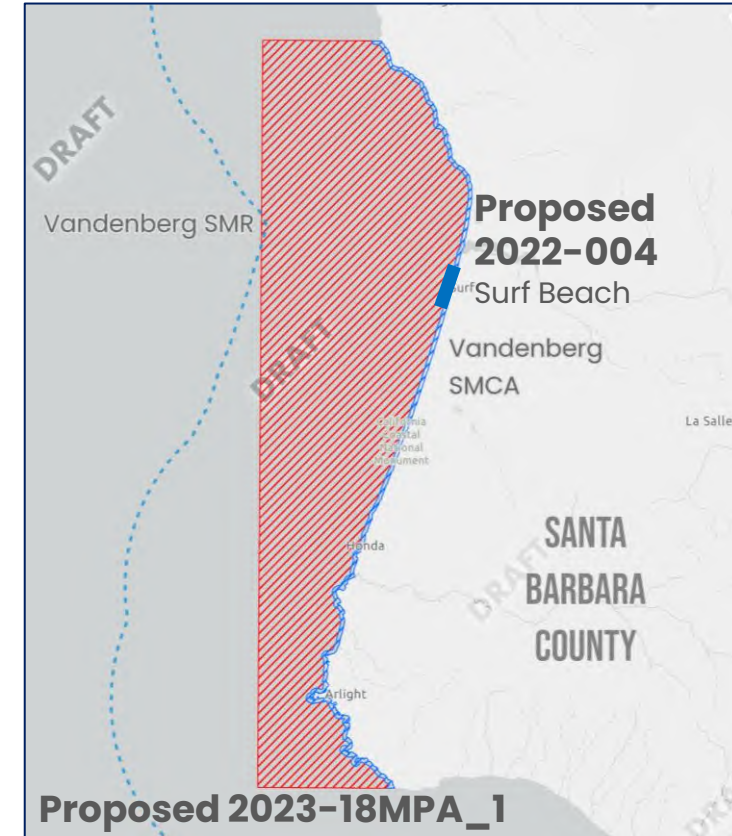
***Non-regulatory**

2023-18MPA_1 (and 2022-004): Reclassify a portion of Vandenberg SMR to a SMCA with recreational take of finfish by hook and line from shore

Summary of Proposed Action:

1. Redesignate a portion of Vandenberg SMR to create a narrow SMCA alongshore for the entire length of Vandenberg SMR that allows recreational take of finfish by hook and line from shore.

(2022-004): Redesignate a portion of Vandenberg SMR to create a small SMCA that allows shore fishing on the one half mile stretch of beach known as Surf Beach.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-18MPA_1 and
DENY 2022-004**

2023-18MPA_3: At Kashtayit SMCA, simplify take regulations to: “Recreational take of finfish, invertebrates, and giant kelp is allowed.”

Summary of Proposed Action:

At Kashtayit SMCA, simplify take regulations to remove the strikethrough text in the following:

“Recreational take of finfish, invertebrates ~~(except rock scallops and mussels)~~, and giant kelp ~~by hand harvest~~ is allowed.”



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-18MPA_3**

2023-18MPA_5-7: Eliminate San Miguel Special Closure; reduce size of Anacapa Island Special Closure and consider removing net/trap closure

Summary of Proposed Actions:

5. Eliminate pinniped special closure at San Miguel Island
6. Reduce the size of the brown pelican Anacapa Island Special Closure regulations to allow boat access to Frenchy's Cove
7. Reassess and consider removing the following special closure at Anacapa Island: "No net or trap may be used in waters less than 20 feet deep off the Anacapa Islands"



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-18MPA_5-7

2023-23MPA_AM: Modify Allowed Uses in Four Monterey Area MPAs, Create a New MPA, and Other Requests

Summary of 28 Proposed Actions:

- 1, 6, and 11. Prohibit recreational and commercial take of finfish when a petitioner-proposed “kelp restoration management permit” is active within 3 MPAs.
- 2, 7, 12, and 16. Allow unlimited recreational urchin removal in 4 MPAs.
- 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19. Allow kelp out-planting , spore dispersal bags, and kelp pruning without an SCP.
20. Establish new Tanker’s Reef SMR near Monterey.
23. *Restoration framework within MPAs and MMAs.
26. Allow commercial urchin harvest in MPAs.
- 28_AM1. *CFGC and CDFW promote kelp restoration collaboration on their website and in public outreach.
- 21, 22, 24_AM1, 25, and 27 Other Requests.

***Non-regulatory**

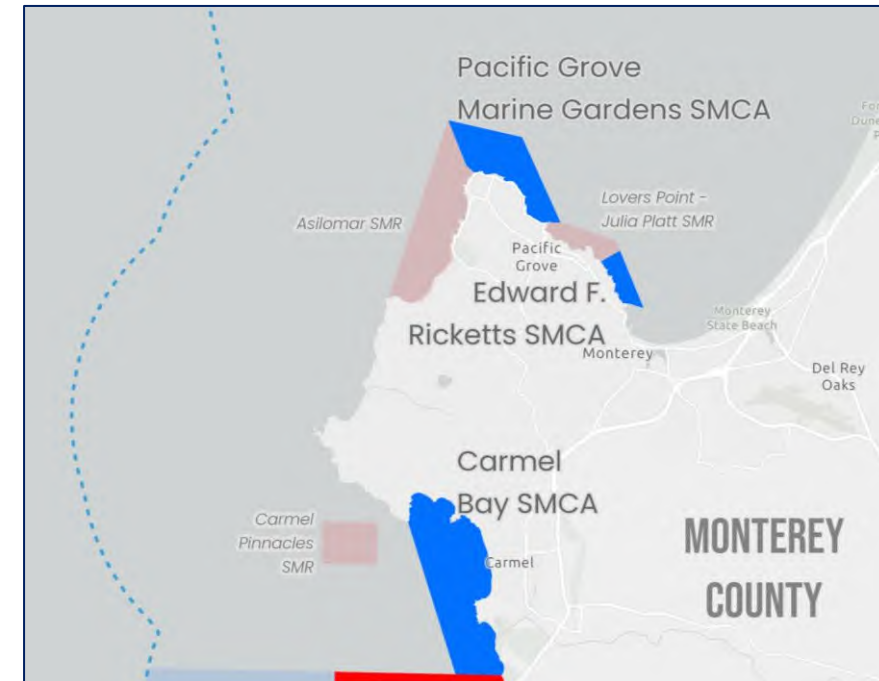


S. Wertz

2023-23MPA_1, 6, and 11 For diver safety, prohibit recreational and commercial take of finfish when a petitioner-proposed “kelp restoration management permit” is active.

3 Proposed Actions Affecting:

- Edward F. Ricketts SMCA
- Pacific Grove Marine Gardens SMCA
- Carmel Bay SMCA

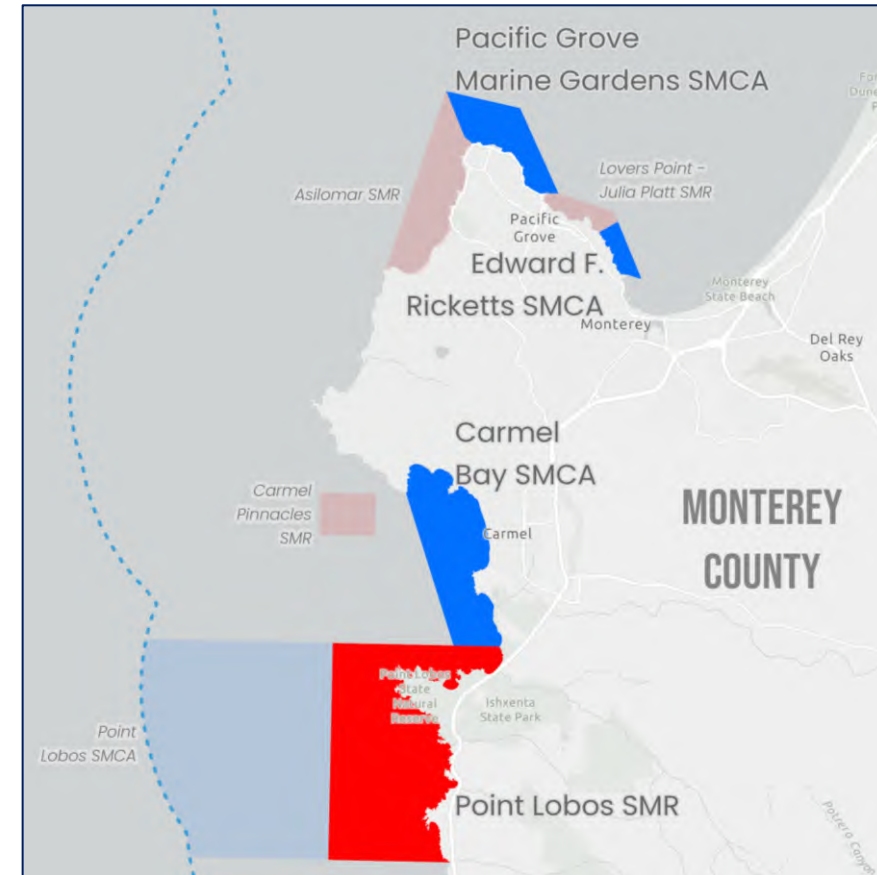


**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-23MPA_1, 6,
and 11**

2023-23MPA_2, 7, 12, and 16 Allow unlimited recreational take of urchin.

4 Proposed Actions Affecting:

- Edward F. Ricketts SMCA
- Pacific Grove Marine Gardens SMCA
- Carmel Bay SMCA
- Point Lobos SMR

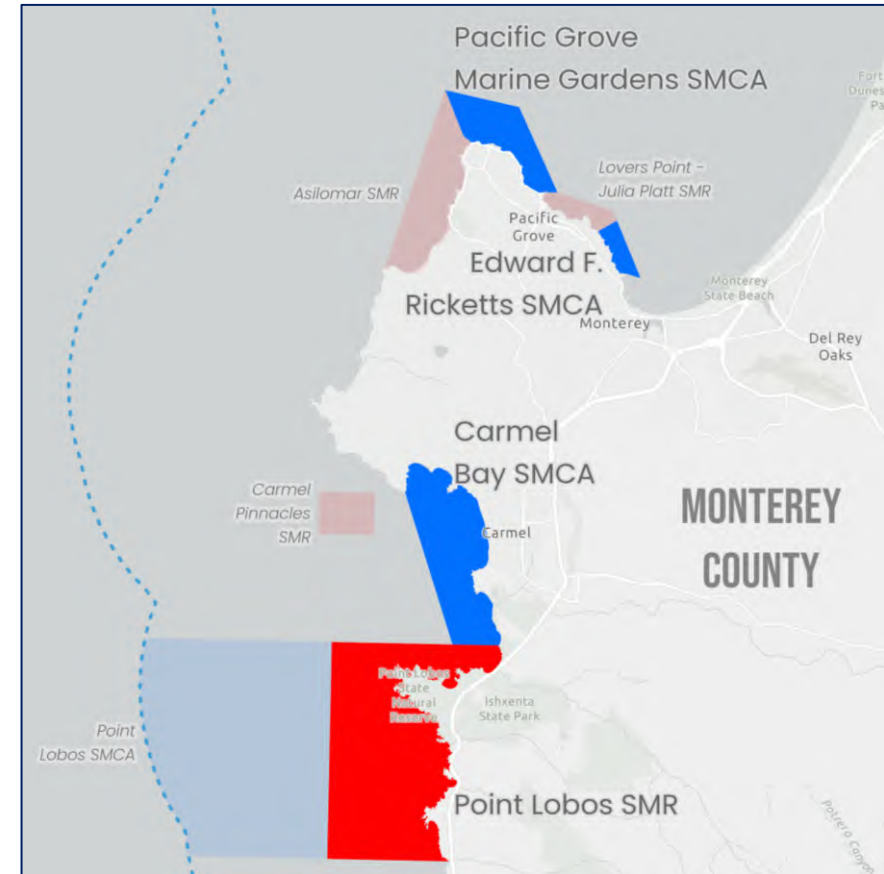


CDFW Recommendation:
**DENY 2023-23MPA_2, 7,
12, and 16**

2023-23MPA_3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19: Allow out-planting of kelp on the reef, spore dispersal by sporophyte bags, and pruning kelp canopy to promote growth and resilience to storms without an SCP.

12 Proposed Actions Affecting:

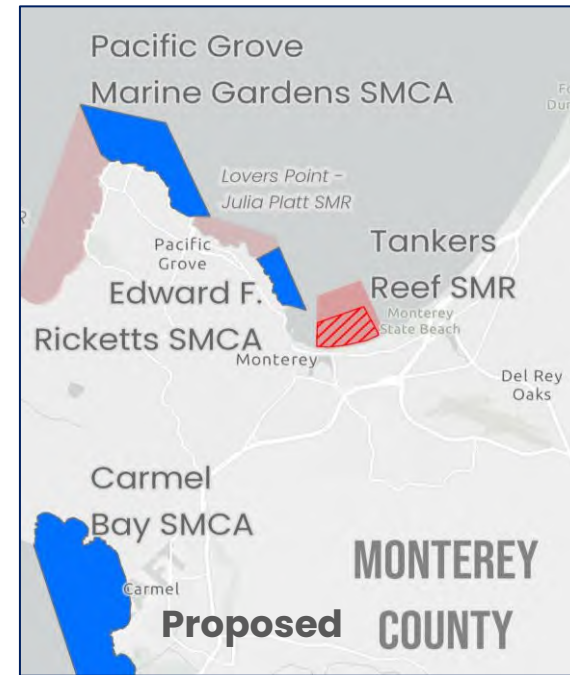
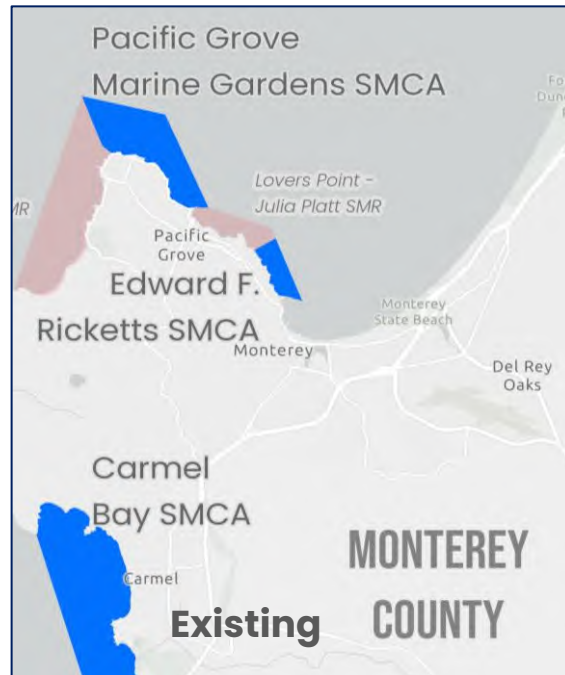
- Edward F. Ricketts SMCA
- Pacific Grove Marine Gardens SMCA
- Carmel Bay SMCA
- Point Lobos SMR



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-23MPA_3-5,
8-10, 13-15, and 17-19

2023-23MPA_20_AM1: Establish New SMR at Tanker's Reef.

Summary of Proposed Action: Establish New SMR at Tanker's Reef near Monterey (covering 193 acres, or 0.3 sq miles)



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-MPA_20_AM1**

2023-23MPA_26: Allow commercial urchin harvest in MPAs for restoration.

Summary of Proposed Action:

Allow commercial urchin harvest in MPAs for kelp restoration.



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-23MPA_26

Summary of Proposed Actions:

21. Create regulatory pathway to allow placing of artificial reef structures and sunken ship for recreational diving.
22. Allow the placement of seasonal mooring buoys in permitted restoration areas including MPAs.
- 24_AM1. Establish an approval process within CDFW's SCP program to grant permits of up to ten years for urchin removal and kelp restoration within MPAs.

CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023–23MPA_21

CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023–23MPA_22

CDFW Recommendation:
**DENY 2023–
23MPA_24_AM1**

Summary of Proposed Actions:

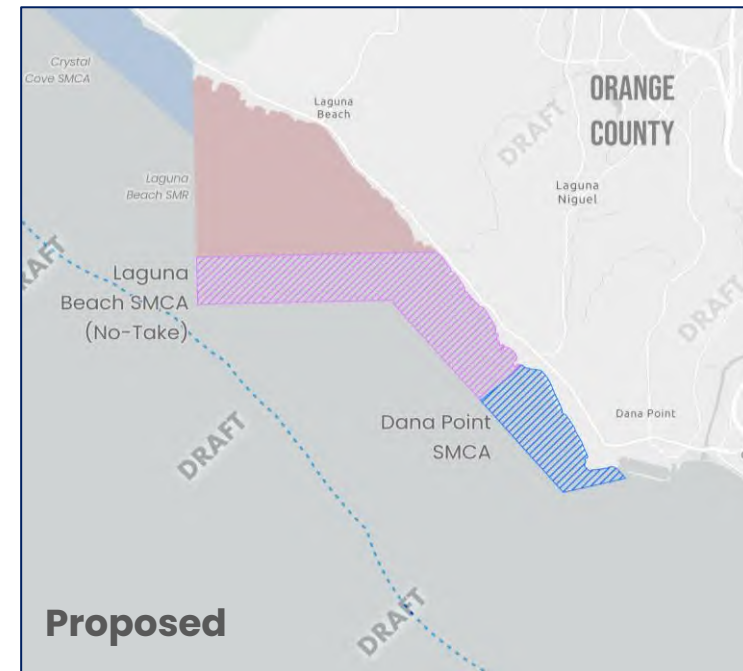
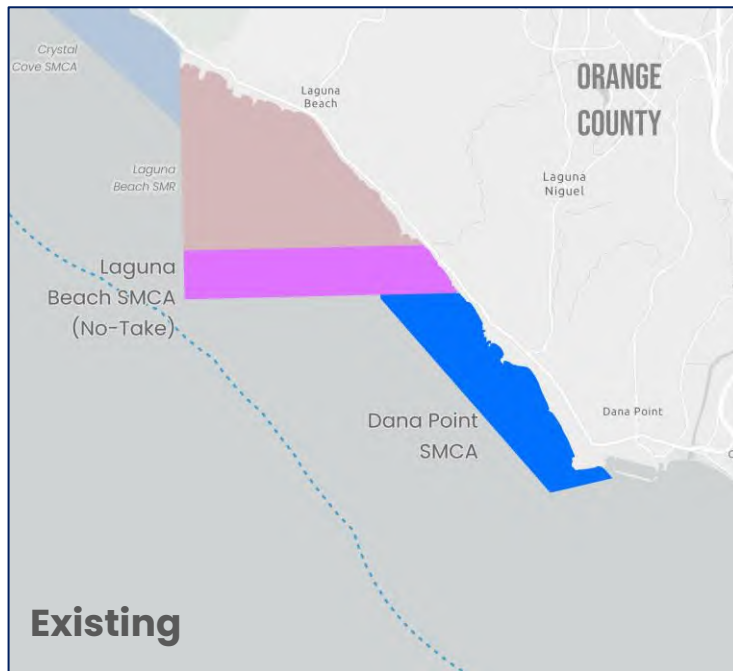
25. Consider proposed kelp restoration sites as Giant Kelp Restoration adopted reefs for continued kelp restoration.
27. Grant commercial urchin divers an exemption to Wanton Waste Rule to allow for take of un-marketable urchins while participating in kelp restoration and/or allow commercial divers to take urchin under recreational rules.

CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-23MPA_25

CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-23MPA_27

2023-24MPA_AM: Extend the Laguna Beach No-take SMCA southern boundary to the southern border of the City of Laguna Beach.

Summary of Proposed Action: Extend the Laguna Beach No-take SMCA southern boundary to the southern border of the City of Laguna Beach, which will require modification of the northern boundary of Dana Point SMCA (modified boundaries as amended).



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-24MPA_1_AM1

2023-27MPA_AM: Amend existing Anacapa Island SMCA or Special Closure to Protect Eelgrass While Allowing for Community Access.

Summary of Proposed Action:

Amend existing Anacapa Island SMCA or Special Closure, evaluating three options (solutions) and choose the one that best protects the eelgrass meadow while allowing for community access.



2023-27MPA_AM1_1: Select best of three options to amend existing Anacapa Island SMCA or Special Closure to protect the eelgrass meadows and allow community access.

3 Petitioner Proposed Options:

- i. Change Anacapa Island SMCA regulations to disallow commercial California spiny lobster (*Panulirus interruptus*) fishing year-round.
- ii. Change Anacapa Island SMCA regulations to disallow hard bottomed fishing gear (including anchoring if applicable) near eelgrass meadows.
- iii. Change the border of the Anacapa Island Special Closure, prohibiting the deployment of lobster traps in waters from 0-30 meters (0-98.43 feet) deep instead of the existing 0-6.1 meters (0-20 feet) deep off Anacapa Island.

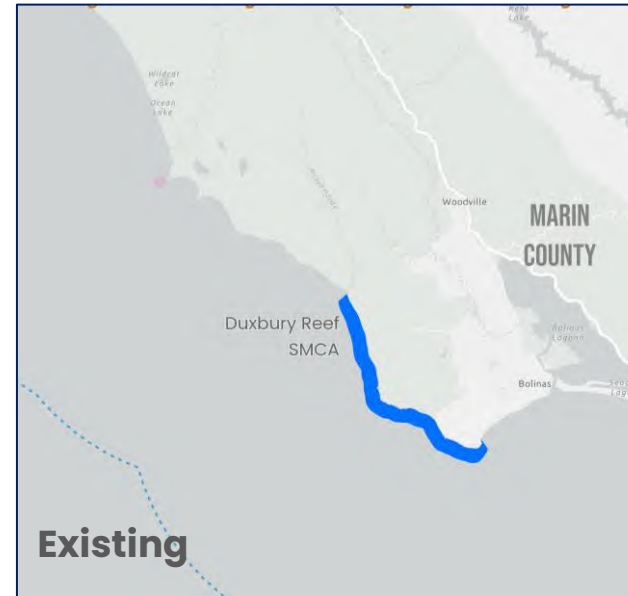


**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY all options 2023-
27MPA_AM1_1**

2023-32MPA: Reclassify Duxbury Reef SMCA to an SMR and Expand the Southern and Northern Boundaries

Summary of 3 Proposed Actions:

1. Reclassify Duxbury Reef SMCA to an SMR to prohibit take.
2. Expand Duxbury Reef MPA by extending the southern boundary to encompass the southern portion of the reef
3. Expand Duxbury Reef MPA by extending the northern boundary to Double Point/Stormy Stack Special Closure.



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-32MPA_1;
GRANT in Concept 2023-32_2, 3

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

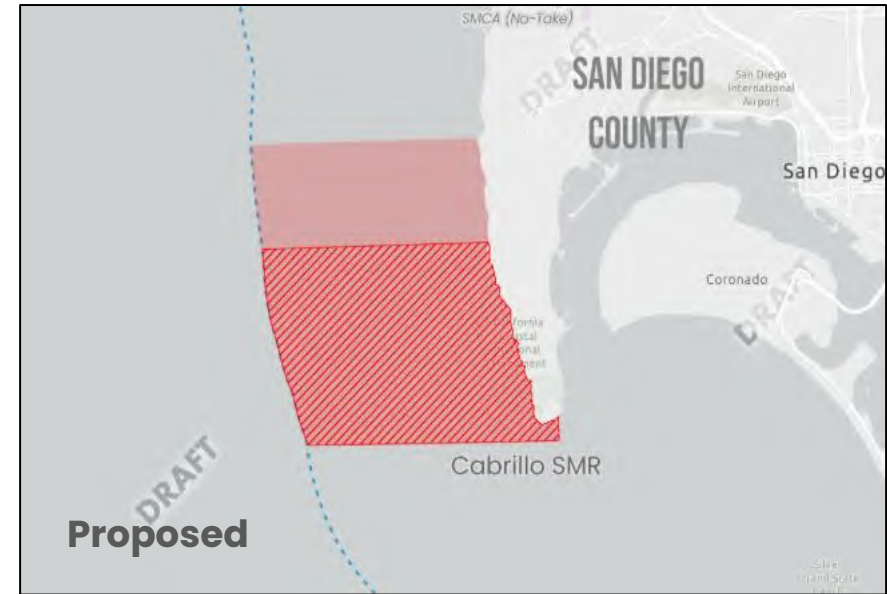
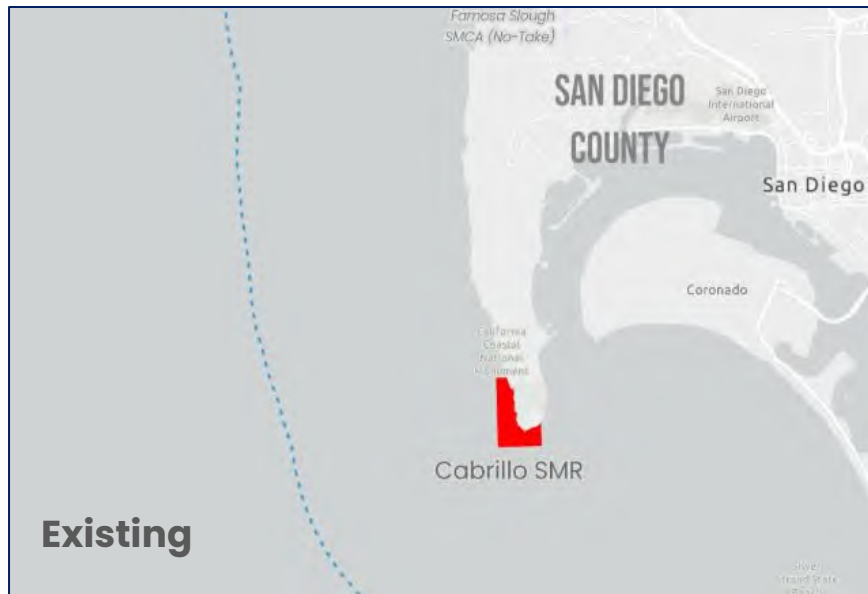
7 Proposed Actions:

1. Expand Cabrillo SMR ~9.99 sq. miles
2. Expand Point Dume SMCA ~4.6 sq. Miles, Add Take
3. Expand South Point SMR by 26.3 sq. miles
4. Expand Gull Island SMR by 1.8 sq. miles
5. Expand Point Conception SMR by 14.6 sq. miles
6. Expand Natural Bridges SMR 14.5 sq. miles
7. Designate a New 3.2 sq. mile SMCA at Pleasure Point (Santa Cruz)



2023-33MPA_1_AM1: Expand Cabrillo SMR ~9.99 sq. miles

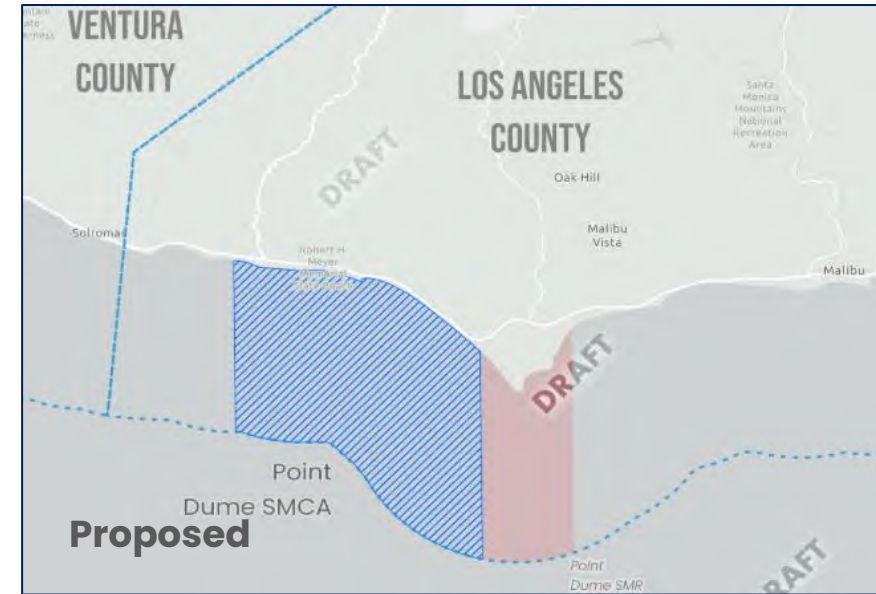
Summary of Proposed Action: Expand Cabrillo SMR westward (to 3 nautical mile state line) and northward (to New Hope Rock) by ~9.99 sq mi.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_1_AM1**

2023-33MPA_2_AM1: Expand Point Dume SMCA ~4.6 sq. Miles, Add Recreational Take Allowance From Shore by Hook-and-Line and Spear

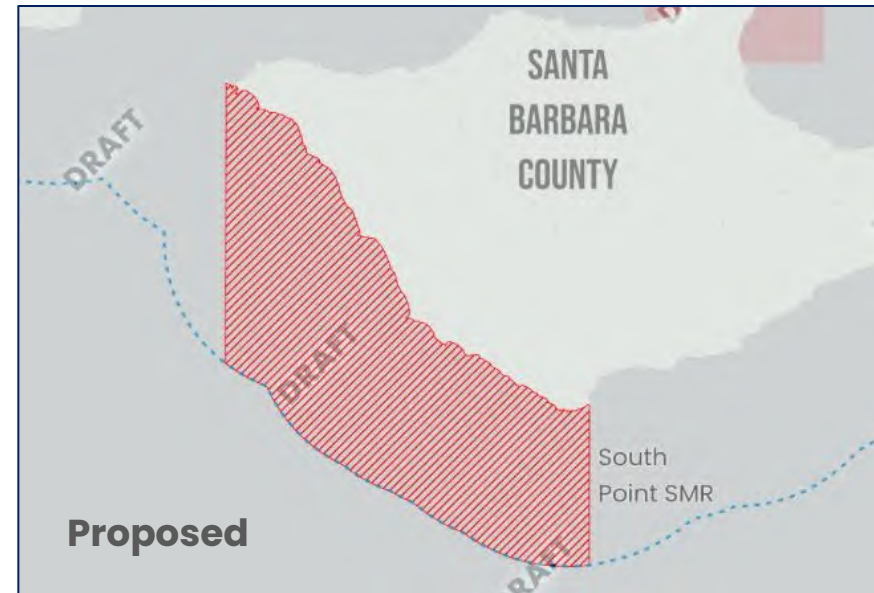
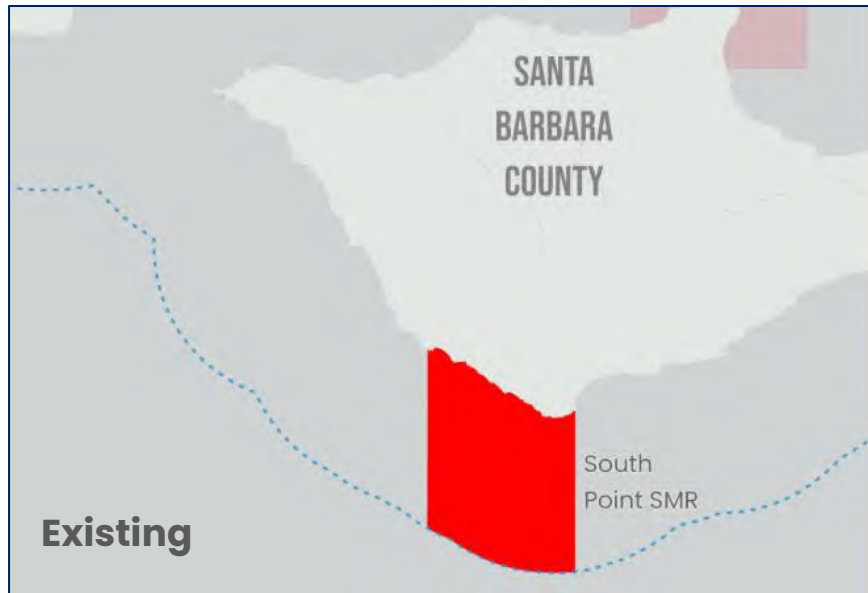
Summary of Proposed Action: Expand Point Dume SMCA westward by 4.6 sq mi and add allowance for recreational take from shore by hook-and-line and spearfishing.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_2_AM1**

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

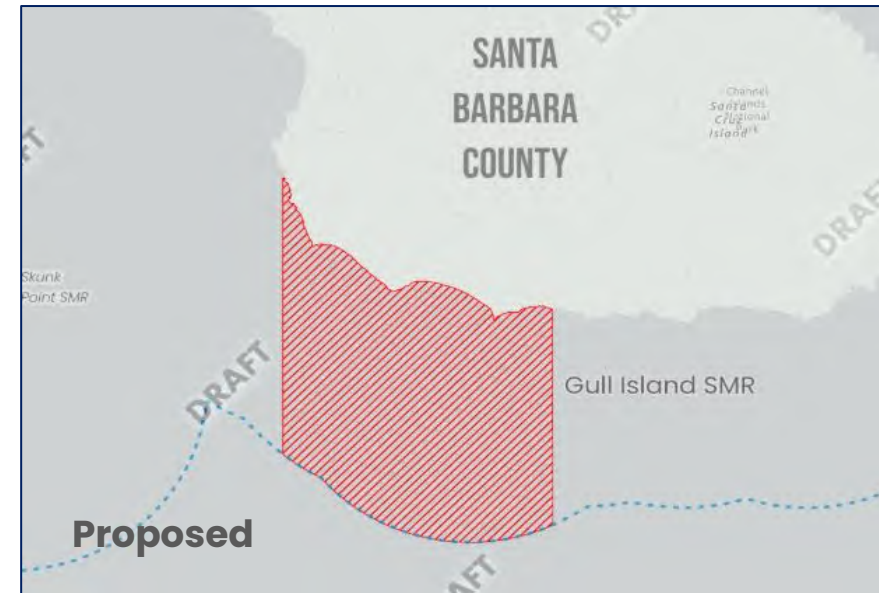
Summary of Proposed Action: Expand South Point SMR westward by 26.3 sq mi.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_3**

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

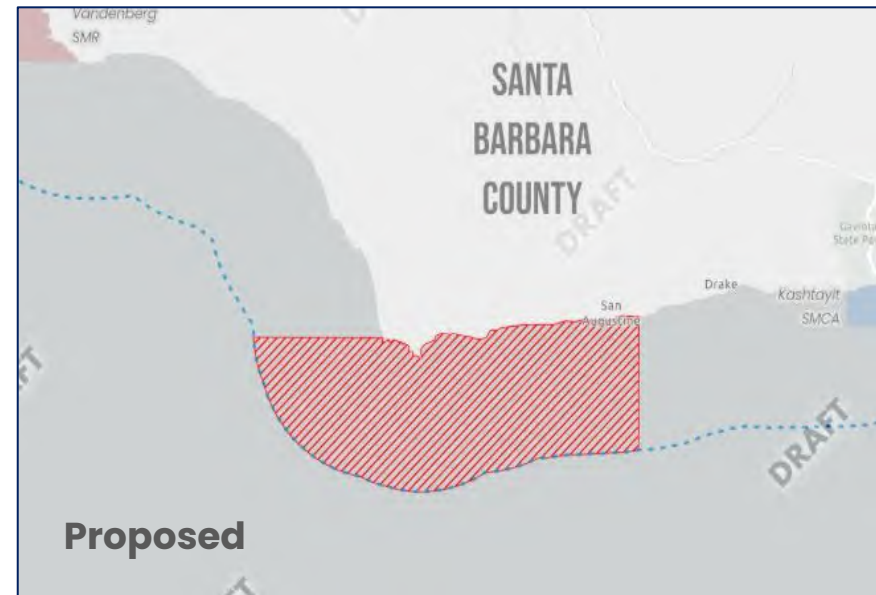
Summary of Proposed Action: Expand Gull Island SMR northward by 1.8 sq mi.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_4**

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

Summary of Proposed Action: Expand Point Conception SMR eastward by 14.6 sq mi.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_5**

2023-33MPA_6_AM1: Expand Natural Bridges SMR 14.5 sq. miles

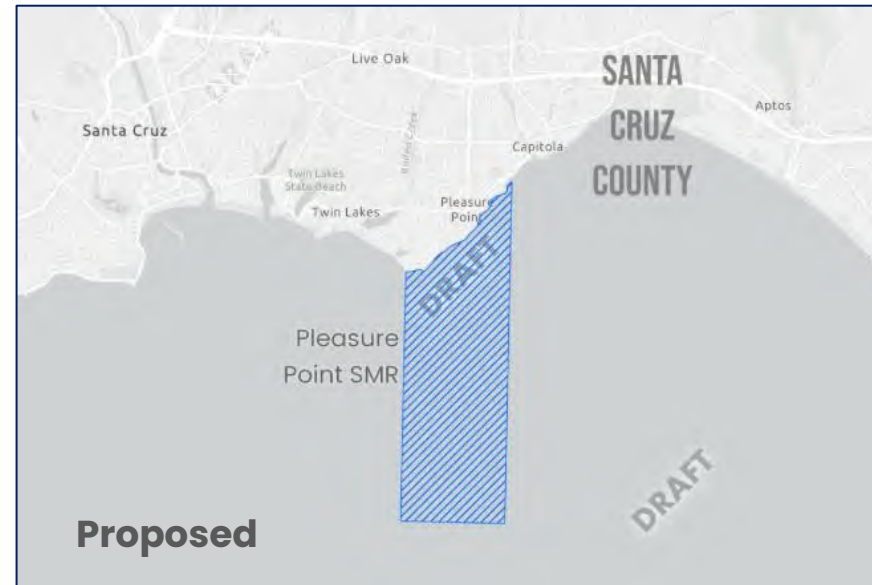
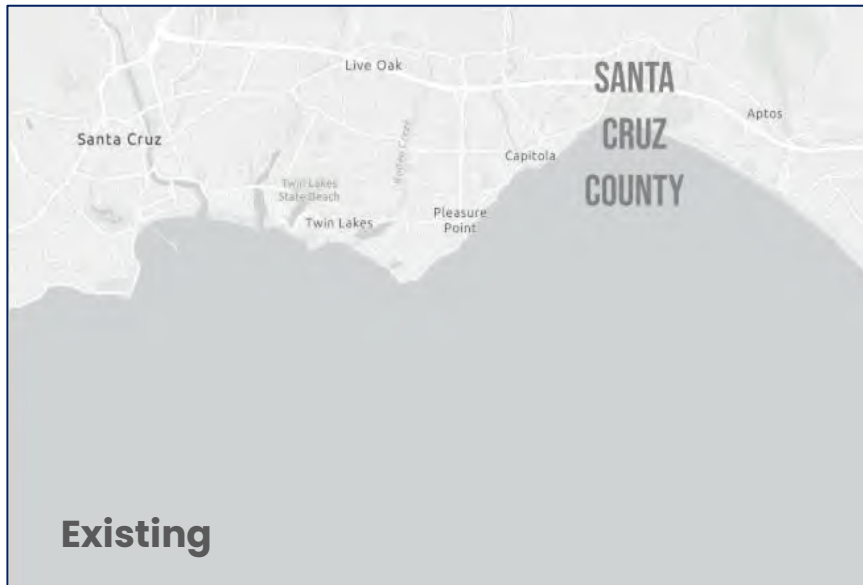
Summary of Proposed Action: Expand Natural Bridges SMR southward and eastward to the edge of Natural Bridges State Beach by ~14.5 sq mi.



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_6_AM1

2023-33MPA_7_AM1: Designate a new 3.2 sq mi SMCA at Pleasure Point (Santa Cruz)

Summary of Proposed Action: 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.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-33MPA_7_AM1**

2023–34MPA: Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR and Limit Allowable Uses at Farnsworth Onshore and Offshore SMCAs to Recreational Spearfishing

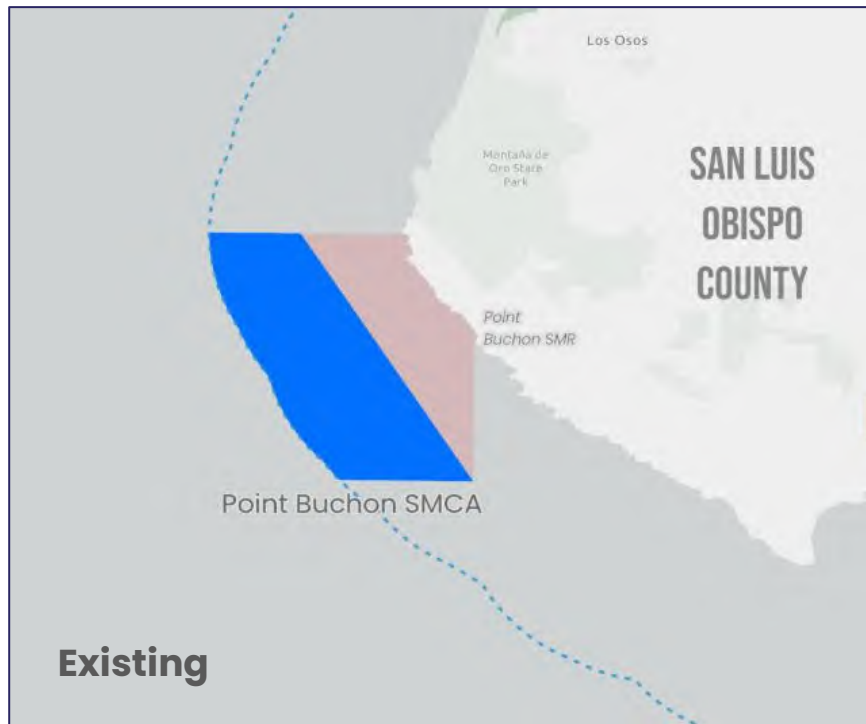
3 Proposed Actions:

1. Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR.
2. Limit Allowable Uses Farnsworth Onshore SMCA to Recreational Spearfishing.
3. Limit Allowable Uses Farnsworth Offshore SMCA to Recreational Spearfishing.



2023-34MPA_1: Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR

Summary of Proposed Action: Reclassify Point Buchon SMCA to an SMR to prohibit take.



**CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-34MPA_1**

2023-34MPA_2-3: Change Farnsworth Onshore and Offshore SMCA regulations to allow only recreational spearfishing

Summary of Proposed Actions:

Change regulations to allow only recreational spearfishing within Farnsworth Onshore and Offshore SMCA boundaries.

Existing regulations:

Offshore SMCA: allows recreational take of pelagic finfish by *hook-and-line or spearfishing*; commercial take of coastal pelagic species by round-haul net, brail gear, and light boat; and swordfish by harpoon

Onshore SMCA: allows recreational take of pelagic finfish by *spearfishing only*

Both MPAs: allows recreational take of market squid by hand-held dip net; white seabass by spearfishing; and marlin, tuna and dorado by trolling



CDFW Recommendation:
DENY 2023-34MPA_2-3

Next Steps

- Five Tribally-led petitions: Discussed at April 14 CFGC TC
- Upcoming Regional Petition Discussion Meetings:
 - **April 21, San Mateo** Elks Lodge, Del Norte through Monterey counties
 - **May 5-6, Goleta** Hilton Garden Inn, San Luis Obispo through Santa Barbara counties
 - **May 19, San Clemente** Holiday Inn Express, Los Angeles through San Diego counties, including Santa Catalina Island
- For more information about regional meetings:
fgc.ca.gov/Meetings/2026



Recap: DMR Adaptive Management Recommendations

Near-Term (ongoing – 2 years)

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

Mid-Term (2 – 5 years)

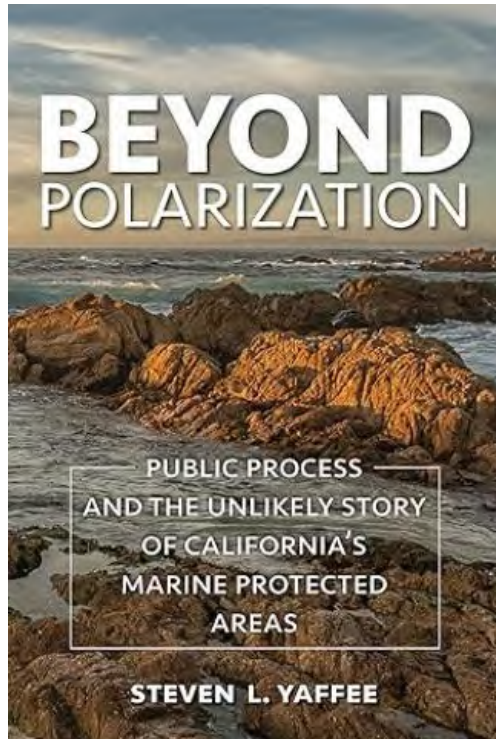
- **Rec 2: Create pathway to tribal MPA management**
- **Rec 3: Build tribal capacity to participate in MPA management**
- **Rec 6: Include and fund more diverse researchers and stakeholders**
- **Rec 8: Evaluate MPA accessibility**
- **Rec 12: Improve understanding of human dimensions**
- **Rec 13: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

Long-Term (5– 10 years)

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



Power of Collaboration



"After almost 100 years on the planet, I now understand the most important place on Earth is not on land, but at sea"

Sir David Attenborough





March 20, 2026

California Fish and Game Commission
715 P Street, 16th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
Transmitted via email: fgc@fgc.ca.gov

Re: Petitions to Adaptively Manage California’s Marine Protected Area Network

Dear Chair Sklar, Vice Chair Anderson and Members of the Fish and Game Commission,

Thank you for your continued leadership and partnership to manage California’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network. As environmental threats intensify across the world’s oceans and coasts, our state’s MPA Network stands out as a globally recognized model of ocean conservation.

The California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) submits this letter at the request of our Chair, Secretary Wade Crowfoot, to provide input on proposals to adaptively manage California’s MPA Network. OPC is grateful for the ongoing collaboration with the Fish and Game Commission and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to manage the MPA Network, and our input provided here is intended to complement CDFW staff’s evaluation of MPA petitions. OPC staff will follow this letter with more specific input on submitted petitions prior to the Commission’s regional public meetings.

OPC’s Role in the MPA Network

OPC has a unique role in the management of our MPA network that leads us to provide input on its adaptive management. OPC is statutorily responsible for the direction of MPA policy (SB 96, 2013) and in this role, we set strategic priorities for the Network, lead coordinated implementation of the State’s MPA Management Program, and convene the MPA Statewide Leadership Team, an advisory body of state and federal agencies, tribal representatives, and implementation partners, to coordinate MPA management activities across the state. OPC also directs funding to manage the Network through research, monitoring, enforcement, outreach, and restoration activities, with over \$110 million in state investment since 2007.

OPC's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan includes four primary goals to protect ocean health and coastal communities through the end of this decade: build resilience to climate change; maximize community benefits and stewardship; safeguard coastal and marine biodiversity; and enable a sustainable blue economy that protects ocean health.

OPC's Strategic Plan includes the explicit objective of strengthening the performance and durability of California's MPA Network. To achieve this objective, OPC staff has been directed to develop science-based recommendations to support ongoing adaptive management of the MPA Network, develop pathways for collaborative stewardship and co-management of MPAs with California Native American tribes, establish clear MPA performance targets, develop an updated MPA Monitoring Action Plan to evaluate progress toward those targets, and fund long-term monitoring of the Network.

The Strategic Plan also directs several broader actions relevant to the MPA Network: building ecosystem resilience to climate change, conserving and restoring vulnerable habitats, and supporting thriving fishing communities and climate-resilient fisheries, among other efforts.

Adaptive Management of the MPA Network

OPC views the MPA Network as California's most important marine ecosystem conservation tool, and the Network has served as a model for marine biodiversity conservation around the world. It is the only network of protected areas in the world recognized on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas. This global designation recognizes the science-based, ecologically connected and community-driven design of the Network, the state's demonstrated history of ongoing adaptive management through our comprehensive MPA Management Program, and the ecological and social benefits of the Network shown in the Decadal Management Review.

California's MPA Network also serves as a foundation to achieve the state's 30x30 law, which requires state agencies to conserve 30 percent of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030. Our State Legislature and Governor through this law have directed us on a pathway to conserve more of our state waters this decade. Marine protected areas, which cover 16.2% of state waters, achieve more than half of this legally required conservation. While adaptively managing the MPA Network through the Commission and CDFW's process is one strategy in meeting the state's 30x30 goals, it is important to emphasize that MPAs are not the only strategy to achieve this conservation target. OPC has identified additional conservation approaches to achieve 30x30 outside of the MPA Network, including supporting tribally-led conservation, such as the Chumash National Marine Sanctuary established in 2024, strengthening biodiversity protections within National Marine Sanctuaries and exploring the role of other area-based coastal and marine designations in conserving biodiversity.

The Decadal Management Review, which assessed the effectiveness of the MPA Network, clearly showed that our MPA Network is improving ocean health. This is due in large part to the fully protected, no-take State Marine Reserves that form the ecological backbone of the Network. However, the Decadal Review did not specifically explore how to strengthen the MPA Network. OPC

believes considering current petitions with this question in mind is important to adaptively manage the Network. Given OPC’s explicit objective to strengthen the performance and durability of the Network into the future, our input will address whether petitions hold promise to achieve this objective.

Given OPC’s commitment to strengthening the performance of the MPA Network, our staff is generally concerned about any proposals that remove existing protections within the current MPA Network. While specific petitions that recommend such changes must be addressed on a case-by-case basis, it is important to maintain the strength of the existing Network, which leaves over 90% of state waters open for fishing, with 84% of state waters having no MPA-related restrictions on fishing.

MPA Conservation Amidst Climate Change and other Environmental Challenges

Climate change is already affecting marine life and habitats, with impacts expected to increase over time. The catastrophic collapse of kelp forest ecosystems off California’s North Coast is just one example of how climate change can cause, accelerate or compound other stressors facing California’s coast and ocean. Climate impacts also often have cascading effects, not just for ecosystems but for coastal economies and communities that rely on a healthy ocean.

MPAs are a tool to protect full ecosystems, and although the role of MPAs in supporting climate resilience is the subject of ongoing scientific study, species and habitats inside MPAs across the globe have been shown to better withstand and rebound from climate-driven impacts than unprotected areas. Scientific evidence suggests that the protections provided by MPAs – such as maintaining genetic diversity, keeping food webs intact, and supporting large population sizes – can help buffer climate impacts and help serve as an “insurance policy” against future uncertainty. MPAs can also help mitigate climate change by protecting habitats that sequester carbon, such as wetlands and seagrass meadows.

California’s MPA Network likely already provides important climate resilience benefits by functioning as an ecologically connected statewide network and protecting multiple types of habitats. However, adaptive management represents a critical opportunity to bolster these benefits, for example by ensuring that vulnerable ecosystems are adequately represented in the Network, or by identifying and protecting areas that will become new safe havens as species move northward with warming water.

Prioritizing Tribal Stewardship and Co-Management

California Native American tribes have stewarded the lands and waters of what is now known as California since time immemorial. Revitalizing tribally-led conservation and protecting places with biocultural significance, which reflects the fundamental interconnectedness of people and place, is a key priority for the Newsom Administration and is critical to healing past harms and protecting and restoring nature.

OPC’s 2026-2030 Strategic Plan and the recommendations in the Decadal Management Review highlight tribal MPA co-governance and co-management as a top priority for the state. Creating a clear path to tribal co-governance, co-management, and collaborative stewardship of MPAs – whether that is focused on existing MPAs or new MPAs proposed by tribes – can help reconnect tribes to their ancestral waters, cultural lifeways, and traditional stewardship practices, ultimately supporting improved tribal community well-being as well as providing strong benefits for biodiversity. OPC is highly supportive of adaptive management actions that advance co-governance, co-management, and collaborative stewardship with tribes.

Support Thriving Fishing Communities and Climate-Resilient Fisheries

OPC recognizes the critical importance of enabling a sustainable blue economy that protects ocean health, of which fishermen and fishing communities are central. Myriad environmental stressors have diminished health of our fisheries over the last decade: extreme events such as extended droughts; changing ocean conditions that generate new threats such as expanded domoic acid outbreaks; marine ecosystem breakdown including collapse of kelp forest ecosystems; pollution into our coastal waters; and impaired river health through excessive historic diversions.

Our MPA Network is one important response to protect and restore the health of our fisheries over the long term to weather these changes, given clear evidence that protected areas generate healthier ecosystems that provide the basis of sustainable, abundant fisheries into the future. It should be noted that the sum total of current petitions before the Commission to strengthen the Network covers only 2.1% of coastal waters. If all petitions were adopted, 83% of state waters would remain open to fishing.

OPC believes a strong, resilient MPA network is essential both for the environmental health of our ocean and the future abundance of our fisheries. We also deeply value the fishermen and fishing communities that help support California’s booming coastal economy and are critical partners in our efforts to understand ecosystem shifts and safeguard marine life and habitats. OPC will continue to prioritize collaboration and investments that help fishermen and fishing communities adapt and thrive as climate-driven impacts accelerate the need for flexible and innovation solutions. This includes investments that reduce entanglement in fishing gear to protect whales while keeping fishermen on the water, promote California wild-caught seafood, improve waterfront infrastructure, and advance planning that supports community sustainability and resilience.

Input on Specific Petitions

In coming weeks, OPC plans to provide specific input on existing petitions through our MPA policy lens articulated in this letter. We believe this can complement the rigorous assessment that CDFW staff completed of petitions under a separate set of questions and criteria established by the Commission. We will provide this input and recommendations in advance of the Commission’s public meetings on these petitions.

We recognize and appreciate that CDFW's evaluation recommendations are based on petition amendments that were received by the March 2025 deadline. CDFW staff quite reasonably needed to establish a deadline after which new proposed revisions to the petitions could not be assessed in their evaluation. We also understand that many petitioners have been working for months to revise their petitions to be responsive to community feedback and concerns. OPC's policy recommendations will be based on the petitions as currently amended.

Lastly, we are deeply appreciative of all the Commission is doing to provide a clear, accessible venue to collect the full range of perspectives on these MPA petitions. We value and respect this diversity of perspectives and are committed to finding creative solutions that reflect the range of tribal, conservation and fishing priorities in the state, with a shared goal of ensuring a healthy and thriving ocean for all Californians, now and into the future.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions or to discuss our shared efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenn Eckerle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jenn Eckerle
Executive Director

cc:

Melissa Miller-Henson, FGC Executive Director
Susan Ashcraft, FGC Marine Advisor
Meghan Hertel, CDFW Director
Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager