

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

**Designate a New SMCA Near Point Sal with an Allowance
for Recreational Take of Finfish by Hook-and-Line From
Shore (2023-28MPA_AM2)**



I. PETITION SUMMARY

CFGC Tracking Number	2023-28MPA_AM2
Petition Contact/Affiliation	Lisa Suatoni, Natural Resources Defense Council; co-sponsored by Northern Chumash Tribal Council
Number of Proposed Actions	1
Affected MPAs	Point Sal State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA; proposed new MPA)
Petition Summary	Designate a new SMCA that is just over 9 sq mi around Point Sal in central California with allowance for recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore; consult with tribes to identify a traditional tribal name for the new MPA; include language to allow for take incidental to mission-critical operations at Vandenberg Space Force Base, discretionally restrict public entry, and require CDFW to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Commander of Vandenberg Space Force Base for the mutually beneficial management and administration of the Point Sal SMCA; and then work to formalize an official collaborative co-stewardship agreement among CDFW, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council (NCTC), and other interested tribes.
Link to StoryMap page	2023-28MPA_AM2



July 2026

II. CDFW RECOMMENDATIONS AND BRIEF JUSTIFICATION

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

Petition Action ID and Proposed Action	Petitioner's Stated Rationale and Brief Justification for Proposed Actions
2023-28MPA_AM2 Designate a new SMCA that is just over 9 sq. mi. around Point Sal in central California with allowance for recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore; consult with tribes to identify a traditional tribal name for the new MPA; include language to allow for take incidental to mission-critical operations at Vandenberg Space Force Base (VSFB), discretionally restrict public entry, and require CDFW to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Commander of VSFB for the mutually beneficial management and administration of the Point Sal SMCA; and then work to formalize an official collaborative co-stewardship agreement among CDFW, the Northern Chumash Tribal Council (NCTC), and other interested tribes.	The petitioner states that the goals of the proposed change are to, "(1) advance Tribal co-stewardship and MPA management through a collaborative co-stewardship approach with the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, (2) protect this rich and productive ecosystem and the biodiversity found within, (3) to protect this larval retention zone and the connectivity dynamics within the region, and (4) to enhance the climate resilience of the broader state MPA network." The petitioners included regulatory language regarding VSFB following conversations with officials at VSFB to accommodate base activities.

CDFW Recommendation and Brief Justification

Support with an Alternative Pathway the non-regulatory request to advance co-management.

At the April 2026 CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, the tribe confirmed the intent is to pursue co-management with CDFW through non-regulatory means. CDFW may enter into tribal co-management agreements with tribes at any time and these do not require action from CFGC or consideration through CFGC's petition process or rulemaking.

The non-regulatory request to advance co-management is aligned with the state's commitments to strengthening and sustaining effective government to government relationships between the state and tribes (Governor Brown's Executive Order B-10-11, Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-15-19, the 2020 Ancestral Lands Policy, and the California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Stewardship Policy) and would advance the following DMR Recommendations: (1) Improve state agencies' tribal engagement and relationship building efforts, (2) Create a clear pathway to tribal MPA management, and (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network, which may lead to advancements in (3) Building tribal capacity to participate in MPA management activities (CDFW 2022).

Recognizing the deep cultural and historical ties of California Native American tribes to their ancestral lands and waters, and consistent with these priority recommendations from the DMR, CDFW is committed to exploring opportunities for co-management and co-stewardship of California's MPAs as well as within areas outside MPA boundaries with NCTC and other interested tribes. These opportunities may be initiated and developed through non-regulatory frameworks and agreements outside of the CFGC petition process and could likely occur on a faster timeline than through the adoption of new MPAs through the CFGC's regulatory process.

Regarding the regulatory request in 2023-28MPA_AM2 to establish a new SMCA around Point Sal that allows recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore:

CDFW was tasked with evaluating the 2023 Bin 2 MPA petitions using guidance from the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), Master Plan, DMR recommendations, and the approved evaluation framework. CDFW thoroughly evaluated this petition within the framework adopted by CFGC and presents the available information here. An MPA was considered at Point Sal during the MLPA Planning Process but was not selected, in part due to socioeconomic considerations. As proposed, the Point Sal MPA would not enhance MPA Network design beyond what the current MPA Network offers because of the Moderate-low Level of Protection (LOP). However, there are alternative designations that can be

used to recognize the cultural significance of the location or that would offer greater ecological protections than the proposed SMCA, consistent with Science Advisory Team (SAT) Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process (i.e., SMR, Special Closure). The various designations (i.e., SMCA as proposed, SMCPA, MPA with at least a Moderate-high LOP, and Special Closure) meet different objectives and there are tradeoffs among the alternatives that CFGC will need to consider (e.g., robust ecological protections would limit tribal take and recreational and commercial fishing) (See Table 1). Below are CDFW's findings after applying the approved Evaluation Framework, followed by Table 1 with considerations for the proposed new Point Sal SMCA compared to alternatives that would better meet the petitioner's stated objectives in a manner that is consistent with the SAT Science Guidelines and CDFW Feasibility Guidelines (CDFW 2010), concluding with a list of potential CFGC actions related to this petition.

CDFW recommends CFGC consider the following:

The proposed SMCA currently includes an allowance for recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore, which is an activity with an assigned Moderate-low LOP. As proposed, the SMCA would offer minimal additional protections relative to the ecological goals described in the petition. Section II of CDFW Feasibility Guidelines (MLPA Goals, Regional Objectives and Site Specific Rationale; CDFW 2010) state that the proposed goals and regional objectives should be consistent with SAT Scientific Guidelines and that the objectives identified for each MPA should be consistent with the design and the allowed take. The MLPA Goals and site-specific objectives identified in the petition for the proposed SMCA are not aligned with the proposed take regulations (e.g., ecological Goals 1 and 2 cannot be attributed to an MPA with an assigned LOP below Moderate-high). The proposed MPA would need to be redesigned to meet the stated goals in the petition and ensure alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines and CDFW Feasibility Guidelines (CDFW 2010). A State Marine Reserve (SMR) with a Very High LOP or a highly protected SMCA (at least a Moderate-high LOP) would align with Goals 1 and 2 by offering stronger protection and would serve as a backbone MPA and add three habitat replicates (i.e., rocky intertidal, beach, and nearshore soft substrate habitat). However, these habitats are currently well replicated in this region of the MPA Network (Table 2), so the extent to which an additional highly protected MPA would enhance local protection or regional connectivity would warrant additional site-specific ecological monitoring data. A reevaluation of MPA Network-wide connectivity using up-to-date average ocean circulation is intended for inclusion in the next DMR to support future assessments of regional connectivity and MPA Network performance, but this is currently a data gap.

The proposed new SMCA at Point Sal would limit NCTC's and other tribes' ability to continue subsistence practices and cultural harvest other than hook-and-line fishing for

finfish from shore. As proposed, the SMCA would prohibit shore-based recreational take of other species (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crab and mussels), as well as offshore/boat fishing. Modifying the proposed SMCA design to provide additional take allowances for NCTC and other non-federally recognized tribes would further diverge from the MPA's ability to meet the ecological goals stated in the petition (MLPA Goals 1 and 2). In contrast, designing the MPA to meet ecological objectives would require an SMCA design with at least a Moderate-high LOP or an SMR with a Very High LOP. Both of these designations would further limit tribal take, including take associated with any cultural or subsistence practices, unless a federally-recognized tribe seeks, and CFGC approves, a tribal take exemption within a SMCA. Current legislative and regulatory frameworks provide pathways for tribal take exemptions for federally recognized tribes (25 C.F.R. § 83, Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14 § 632, subd. (a)(11)). No such pathway exists for non-federally recognized tribes. It is unclear how the proposed change may affect other tribal management and monitoring activities.

The proposed new SMCA at Point Sal was considered in context of potential benefits to the existing MPA Network. The proposed new MPA at Point Sal would be in an area of coastline that is not currently deficient in meeting SAT Science Guidelines for habitat replication or protection. The closest backbone MPAs containing key habitats that would be replicated in the proposed Point Sal SMCA are Vandenberg SMR 10.4 miles south and the Point Buchon SMR/SMCA cluster 19.4 miles north of the proposed Point Sal SMCA. These backbone MPAs are spaced 32.5 miles apart, which is within the recommended spacing interval of 31-62 miles. Additionally, although the proposed MPA exceeds the size threshold of 9 square miles, it does not meet the LOP criterion of Moderate-high or above required by the SAT Science Guidelines. The MPA as proposed would not serve as a backbone MPA and thus would not enhance MPA Network design as defined against Science Guidelines. Additional data are needed to determine if an MPA at this location with a High or Very High LOP would produce meaningful ecological benefits beyond what is achieved by the existing science-based design.

CDFW considered this proposed change in context of the other proposed actions in the 14 other 2023 Bin 2 MPA Petitions. While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR propose decreased protections. The petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. In contrast, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces new protections but not a new backbone MPA as currently proposed because it is not at least 9 sq. mi.; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries. CFGC may need to consider the sequencing of their decision-making for the petitions in this region, particularly for this petition where there may be interplay with decisions for other petitions.

A Special Closure designation would be the most appropriate mechanism to address the concerns raised in the petition regarding birds and pinniped populations utilizing the area around Lion Rock at Point Sal. California MPA designations are not effective tools when the primary objective is to protect these species from human disturbance because MPAs do not limit access to the areas like Special Closures do. The CDFW Feasibility Guidelines state, a “Special Closures should only be proposed if other state and federal regulations are inadequate to provide protections to marine species. Proposed Special Closures should include information on the rationale behind the proposal, species involved, and specific information on why other existing state and federal protections (including the establishment of an MPA) are not adequate.” (CDFW 2010) Although this designation is the most appropriate designation to offer additional protections for birds and/or pinnipeds, CDFW does not have site-specific data documenting that other state and federal protections are not adequate to protect birds and pinnipeds in this area.

The area also provides many opportunities for human connection with the ocean through non-consumptive activities such as swimming, surfing, beach combing, and wildlife viewing. Establishing an SMR or SMCA would not limit recreational access, but a special closure would. Understanding how people interact with and derive benefits from the ocean and how these benefits may be affected by MPAs is challenging (Hall-Arber et al. 2021, CDFW 2022, Travis et al. 2026). Social science research within the MPA Monitoring Program is a rapidly expanding field of MPA research, as well as a priority DMR Recommendation to invest in improving understanding of the human dimensions of MPAs and develop a human dimensions working group and research agenda (DMR Recommendation 12).

The request to add the proposed language regarding VSFB is not needed in Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632 because: (1) Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632, subd. (a) already includes provisions to accommodate “uses of the waters identified as marine protected areas, special closures, or the lands or waters adjacent to these designated areas by the Department of Defense, its allies or agents,” including VSFB; (2) CDFW and VSFB have existing authorities to periodically restrict access to areas, so the language would be redundant; and (3) The directive for CDFW and VSFB to develop an MOU is non-regulatory and CDFW could work with VSFB to amend the existing MOU with VSFB that covers Vandenberg SMR if another MPA is established adjacent to the base.

The proposed Point Sal SMCA has the potential to adversely impact the commercial nearshore groundfish fishery, Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) fleet, and private boat anglers operating out of Morro Bay area ports. Spatial trends in average catch per angler between 2016 and 2024 from the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) indicate the area is heavily used by private boat anglers. Although a summary of potential socioeconomic impacts to fisheries is provided in Question 15, a

thorough analysis of socioeconomic and fiscal impacts was outside the scope of this petition process. CFGC staff may need to conduct additional local outreach to tribes and all interested parties, including, but not limited to, individuals from the sport and commercial fishing industries, aquaculture industries, coastal and ocean tourism and recreation industries, marine conservation organizations, local governments, marine scientists, and the public.

An MPA in this area was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process and intentionally not adopted, in part due to socioeconomic considerations. These socioeconomic concerns are likely still relevant today, but a detailed socioeconomic analysis has not been conducted. Beyond the unknown socioeconomic and fiscal impacts, there are additional gaps in information, including data demonstrating the need for a place-based MPA (e.g., significance of the larval retention zone) or Special Closure.

CDFW EVALUATION 2023-28MPA_AM2 Suatoni

Table 1. A comparison of the proposed new Point Sal MPA that would allow recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore (2023-28_AM2 Point Sal SMCA), and Potential Alternative designations/designs, including a Point Sal State Marine Cultural Preservation Area, a Point Sal SMR or an SMCA at least 9 sq. mi with at least a Moderate-high LOP, and a Special Closure around Lion Rock for birds and pinnipeds.

Considerations	2023-28MPA_AM2	Potential Alternatives		
		Point Sal SMCPA	Point Sal SMR/Mod-High LOP SMCA	Lion Rock Special Closure
Acknowledges the cultural importance of the area to NCTC	No	Yes ¹	No	No
Allows take by California Native American tribes, including take associated with any cultural or subsistence practices	Limited take ²	Yes	No/ Limited Take ³	No
Has the potential to preserve marine cultural heritage by prohibiting take of cultural marine resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Would enhance MPA Network connectivity	No	No	Unknown ⁴	No
Meets SAT Science Guidelines for a backbone MPA	No	No	Yes ⁵	No

¹ An SMCPA designation is a pathway to acknowledge the cultural importance of the area to NCTC but could also to acknowledge the cultural importance of the area to other California Native American tribes pending consultation.

² California Native American tribes would be limited to harvesting finfish by hook-and-line from shore

³ The SMR would prohibit tribal take, including take associated with any cultural or subsistence practices, unless a federally-recognized tribe seeks, and CFGC approves, a tribal take exemption. An SMCA with a Moderate-high LOP would have limited take.

⁴ A reevaluation of MPA Network-wide connectivity using up-to-date average ocean circulation is intended for inclusion in the next DMR to support future assessments of regional connectivity and MPA Network performance

⁵ As a backbone MPA (>9 sq. mi. and at least Moderate-high LOP), the MPA would add 3 habitat replicates (Table 2), but these habitats are already well represented in this region.

CDFW EVALUATION 2023-28MPA_AM2 Suatoni

Considerations	2023- 28MPA_AM2	Potential Alternatives		
		Point Sal SMCPA	Point Sal SMR/Mod-High LOP SMCA	Lion Rock Special Closure
Meets CDFW Feasibility Guideline: MLPA Goals, Regional Objectives and Site-Specific Rationale	No ⁶	NA	Yes	Yes
(a) Addresses a place- based ecological objective, and	No	No	Yes	Yes
(b) There is site-specific data that supports an ecological need for establishing an MPA or Special Closure	No	NA	No	No
Direct benefits to birds or pinnipeds	No	No	No	Yes
Allows recreational fishing	Yes ⁷	Yes ⁷	No	No ⁸
Allows commercial fishing	No	Yes	No	No
Allows recreational access (e.g., kayaking, motorized boats)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Anticipated socioeconomic impacts	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

⁶ To ensure alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines and Feasibility Guidelines (CDFW 2010) and meet the stated goals 1 and 2 in the petition, the MPA would need to be redesigned as a State Marine Reserve (SMR) with a Very High LOP or a highly protected SMCA (at least a Moderate-high LOP).

⁷ Recreational fishing could continue as is if an SMCPA were designated. The SMCA would allow recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore. All other shore-based take (e.g., geological, seaweed, and invertebrates such as crabs and mussels) and boat-based take would be prohibited.

⁸ Recreational and commercial fishing and recreational access would be prohibited in the area within 300 or 1000 feet around Lion Rock, not the 9.27 sq mi area.

Given the considerations above and in the evaluation, CFGC could consider the following options:

1. **Support with Alternative Pathway:** Request CDFW engage with the NCTC, other interested tribes, and California State Parks to explore designating the area as a **State Marine Cultural Preservation Area** to acknowledge the cultural significance of the area, rather than establishing a new MPA.
2. **Grant with Alternative Pathway, Point Sal SMR or a SMCA with at least Moderate-high LOP:** Establish a new MPA at Point Sal and request CDFW identify northern and southern boundaries that are better aligned with Feasibility Guidelines rather than the proposed boundaries in 2023-28MPA_AM2.
3. **Grant with Alternative Pathway, Special Closure Lion Rock:** Establish a new Special Closure around Lion Rock for birds and pinnipeds. This alternative could be considered on its own or as an add-on to Options (1), (2), and (4).
4. **Grant in Concept Point Sal SMCA:** Establish a new SMCA at Point Sal as proposed in 2023-28MPA_AM2 that allows recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore (Moderate-low LOP) and request CDFW identify northern and southern boundaries that are better aligned with Feasibility Guidelines rather than the proposed boundaries in 2023-28MPA_AM2.
5. **Deny:** do not establish a new SMCA (or SMR or Special Closure) at Point Sal.

Finally, the petition included a request to “rename the Point Sal State Marine Conservation Area with a Chumash place name after further consultation with other Chumash Tribes in the region.” If CFGC grants a newly designated area, CDFW recommends CFGC work with NCTC and other tribes as appropriate to identify a name that aligns with CFGC’s Naming Protected Area Policy, which states, “When identifying the name for, or an opportunity to rename, a protected area, the Commission and Department will invite tribes with ancestral ties to that area to engage in meaningful information-sharing about the cultural significance of the area, and to identify traditional or contemporary tribal names for the area. In selecting a name, the Commission will give significant weight to tribally-identified names, with particular emphasis on restoring tribal place names. In its selection, the Commission may consider combining the tribal place name with a currently used name that is understandable and locatable, as appropriate, to ensure accessibility and identification by the broader public while restoring tribal heritage recognition.”

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

The 2023 MPA Petition Companion Document (Attachment 1) includes a summary of the process for identifying Tribally-led petitions, CDFW's outreach to all California Native American tribes⁹ (tribes) throughout the petition process, and a summary of outreach and engagement with Tribally-led petitioners. Tribally-led petitions were evaluated with the CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework.

WAS THE PETITION SUBMITTED BY A CALIFORNIA NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBE, REPRESENTATIVE DESIGNATED BY A TRIBE OR TRIBAL ORGANIZATION, OR HAVE A TRIBAL CO-SPONSOR?

Yes, this petition was submitted by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and co-sponsored by the Northern Chumash Tribal Council (hereafter referred to as NCTC when referring to the tribe or as petitioners when referring to NCTC and NRDC).

IF YES, (a) DOES THE PROPOSED CHANGE EXPLICITLY AIM TO ADVANCE TRIBAL CO-MANAGEMENT, SUBSISTENCE HARVESTING, STEWARDSHIP, AND/OR PROVIDE A TRIBAL BENEFIT THROUGH RECOGNIZING THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AN AREA?

Yes, the petition aims to provide a tribal benefit by recognizing the cultural significance of the area and advance tribal co-management and marine stewardship through the development of an agreement among CDFW, NCTC, and other interested tribes. The petitioners state that:

"Point Sal also holds cultural significance for the Chumash people, with evidence of their occupation as recently as 250 years ago and as far back as 4,800 years ago; Chumash artifacts are visible throughout Point Sal, and analyses of burial sites from the area demonstrate the rich cultural ties to the traditional stewards of this land. Furthermore, Point Sal is still of importance to the Chumash people who visit and use the area today. Protecting the marine waters and coastal resources of Point Sal would help to recognize its value as a cultural heritage site that still contributes to the identity, sense of place, and cultural and subsistence practices for many of the Indigenous people of Central California today. Cosponsored by the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, the Point Sal SMCA seeks to advance Tribal co-stewardship and management of a California MPA."

⁹ 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.

(b) IS THE PROPOSED REGULATORY CHANGE EXPLICITLY LINKED TO A TRIBE OR TRIBES (I.E., TRIBAL EXEMPTION, TRIBAL TAKE ONLY MPA, OR NEW MPA FOR CO-MANAGEMENT)?

Yes, the petitioners propose a regulatory change to create a new SMCA at Point Sal and consult with tribes to identify a traditional tribal name for the new MPA to, “advance Tribal co-stewardship and MPA management through a collaborative co-stewardship approach with the Northern Chumash Tribal Council.” The petition includes a non-regulatory request to formalize an official collaborative co-stewardship agreement among CDFW, NCTC, and other interested tribes.

IV. PETITION EVALUATION

EVALUATION NARRATIVE AND OVERVIEW FOR 2023-28MPA_AM2

The petition proposes to: establish a new SMCA that is 9.27¹⁰ sq miles around Point Sal in the Central Coast region that would prohibit all take except for the recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore; consult with tribes to identify a traditional tribal name for the new MPA; and include language to allow for take incidental to mission-critical operations at Vandenberg Space Force Base (VSFB) which is 10.4 miles south of the proposed MPA, discretionally restrict public entry, and require CDFW to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Commander of VSFB for the mutually beneficial management and administration of the Point Sal SMCA. The petition also includes a recommendation, “that the state consult with local Indigenous communities and Tribes to explore co-management options for the Point Sal SMCA before designation” and to work to formalize an official collaborative co-stewardship agreement among CDFW, NCTC, and other interested tribes.

The new SMCA is intended to:

- “(1) advance Tribal co-stewardship and MPA management through a collaborative co-stewardship approach with the Northern Chumash Tribal Council,
- (2) protect this rich and productive ecosystem and biodiversity found within,
- (3) protect an important larval retention zone and enhance the connectivity dynamics within the region, and
- (4) enhance the climate resilience of the broader state MPA network.”

¹⁰ The petition, 2023-28MPA_AM2, states that the proposed new Point Sal SMCA would be 9.18 sq. mi. Using the coordinates provided in the petition along with CDFW standard jurisdictional layers in ArcGIS, CDFW determined the area of the proposed new SMCA to be 9.27 sq. mi. The discrepancy is likely the result of using different layers for delineating the shoreline.

The petition originally proposed to establish a State Marine Reserve (SMR). The petition was amended March 14, 2025, to add an allowance for recreational take of finfish from shore using hook-and-line, with a corresponding change to the proposed designation from SMR to SMCA (2023-28MPA_AM1). In November 2025, the petitioners submitted a letter to CFGC indicating NCTC was formally cosponsoring the petition and requested amendments to the petition to change the boundary and add language regarding VSFB. The CFGC Tribal Committee and CFGC accepted the petition as a Tribally-led petition at the December 2025 meeting; however, the additional amendments were not accepted or referred to CDFW at that time.

At the April 2026 CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, the petitioners requested CFGC reconsider the November 2025 amendments to add language related to VSFB (see VSFB section below) and move the southern boundary approximately one mile north to “avoid conflicts with existing mission-critical operations of [VSFB].” CFGC accepted and referred the November 2025 amendments to CDFW for evaluation in April 2026 (2023-28MPA_AM2). This is an evaluation of the petition as amended in April 2026, including:

- The non-regulatory request to develop a Tribal co-management agreement with NCTC and other tribes, and
- The regulatory request to establish a new 9.27 sq. mi. SMCA at Point Sal that allows for the recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore with the following boundaries:
 - 34.895212665° N lat. 120.731972573° W long. (southwest corner)
 - 34.929894739° N lat. 120.727488272° W long. (northwest corner)
 - 34.930008197° N lat. 120.666597401° W long. (northeast corner)
 - 34.895212665° N lat. 120.642637239° W long. (southeast corner)

Tribal Co-management and Cultural Considerations

The petition highlights the cultural significance of the Point Sal area and its importance to the tribal communities who have stewarded the area since time immemorial. Evidence of this presence throughout history is so abundant that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages a 77-acre landside portion of this area as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern to protect these important cultural resources. CDFW recognizes and respects NCTC’s longstanding connections with the area. Consistent with DMR priority recommendations for improving tribal coordination and strengthening tribal engagement in MPA governance, CDFW is committed to advancing collaborative stewardship and co-management opportunities with NCTC and other interested tribes in California.

Successful co-management efforts typically share several components, such as clearly defined governance structures, shared management objectives, long-term trust building, and the integration of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems (Armitage et al. 2009, Berkes 2009, Ban et al. 2018, Warrior et al. 2022). In practice, this involves shared responsibility for management activities, such as monitoring, enforcement, and outreach, established through agreements developed collaboratively with tribes on a direct government-to-government basis (Berkes 2009, Ban et al. 2018, Artelle et al. 2019, Murray 2023).

Consistent with this broader understanding, CFGC defines co-management as a collaborative effort established through an agreement in which two or more sovereigns mutually negotiate, define, and allocate amongst themselves the sharing of management functions and responsibilities for a given territory, area, or set of natural resources. Importantly, these frameworks do not necessarily require regulatory or legislative changes; depending on the nature of the activities, they may be established through informal partnerships or non-regulatory formal agreements (e.g., MOU).

Co-sponsorship of the petition by NCTC was formally accepted by CFGC in December 2025. As stated in the petition, “[as] part of NCTC’s ongoing leadership in Chumash stewardship of California’s marine resources, we are committed to garnering strong protections for the sacred and culturally important waters of Point Sal.” The petitioners also “request that upon designation of this SMCA, CDFW work to formalize an official collaborative co-stewardship agreement with NCTC and other interested [t]ribes.” The petition identifies several desired outcomes of co-stewardship, including incorporation of indigenous knowledge into MPA management, meaningful tribal participation in stewardship activities, support for tribal engagement, and facilitation of cultural access and activities within the MPA.

CDFW shares the petitioners’ goals of advancing tribal stewardship and co-management and is committed to continuing to work with tribes towards collaborative, government-to-government co-management agreements. As this is a non-regulatory request, CDFW may pursue these agreements with tribes independently of the CFGC petition process, which has the benefit of greater flexibility that provides enhanced opportunities for tribal engagement, partnership-building, and integration of traditional ecological knowledge into durable co-management structures, likely on timelines faster than could be achieved through the CFGC’s regulatory program. The non-regulatory request to advance co-management is aligned with the state’s commitments to strengthening and sustaining effective government to government relationships between the state and tribes (Governor Brown’s Executive Order B-10-11, Governor Newsom’s Executive Order N-15-19, the 2020 Ancestral Lands Policy, and the California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Stewardship Policy) and would advance the following

DMR Recommendations: (1) Improve state agencies' tribal engagement and relationship building efforts, (2) Create a clear pathway to tribal MPA management, and (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network, which may lead to advancements in (3) Building tribal capacity to participate in MPA management activities (CDFW 2022). These opportunities may be initiated and developed through non-regulatory frameworks and agreements outside of the CFGC petition process and could likely occur on a faster timeline than adoption of new MPAs through CFGC's regulatory process.

State Marine Cultural Preservation Areas

The petition highlights the historical and cultural importance of the Point Sal area, stating that, "Protecting the marine waters and coastal resources of Point Sal would help to recognize its value as a cultural heritage site that still contributes to the identity and sense of place, and cultural and subsistence practices for many of the Indigenous people of Central California today." These are important considerations that warrant continued research and engagement. Consideration of marine cultural heritage is also consistent with broader state efforts to better represent the cultural and historical significance of coastal areas. DMR Recommendation 24 highlights the importance of incorporating marine cultural heritage into MPA Network design and management, reflecting the recognition that the cultural significance of the coast could be better represented in the MPA Network. Similarly, California State Parks seeks to preserve examples of the state's diverse cultural heritage, particularly along underrepresented themes such as settlement and subsistence patterns associated with coastal prehistoric villages and tribal maritime exploration¹¹.

Given the petition's emphasis on cultural recognition and preservation, an alternative designation that may warrant consideration is a State Marine Cultural Preservation Area (SMCPA). An SMCPA is one of 6 Marine Managed Areas defined and established in the Marine Managed Areas Improvement Act (MMAIA, Pub. Resources Code, §§ 36600–36900). In contrast to an MPA, an SMCPA is specifically intended to preserve "cultural objects or sites of historical, archaeological, or scientific interest in marine areas," which could serve as a complement to the existing landside BLM protection. SMCPAs are designated by the California State Park and Recreation Commission and either managed by California State Parks or jointly managed with CDFW if there is overlap with an MPA¹².

¹¹ [California State Parks Significant Cultural Resource Properties](#)

¹² Per the MMAIA (Pub. Resources Code § 36700), an area can be designated under more than one classification. Therefore, a defined geographic area could be designated as a standalone SMCPA or may be co-designated with an MPA classification (e.g., SMR, SMP, or SMCA).

This designation may provide an effective mechanism for recognizing and preserving the cultural significance of the area while continuing to explore opportunities for tribal co-management. SMCPAs prohibit the damage, take, or possession of cultural resources, and these protections apply to the cultural resources of any tribe, regardless of federal recognition status.

Importantly, SMCPA designation does not restrict consumptive uses, so it could be a more inclusive approach to highlighting the cultural importance of this area while maintaining existing fishing access. In contrast, implementation of the proposed Point Sal SMCA would limit access to marine resources that are currently available for recreational, traditional, ceremonial, or subsistence purposes that involve take. The petitioners identified supporting cultural access and activities within the MPA as a desired co-stewardship objective. However, except for recreational take of finfish from shore using hook-and-line, the proposed regulations would prohibit all take for all users regardless of tribal status or affiliation. This includes prohibiting shore-based recreational take of other species (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crab and mussels), as well as boat fishing. Even if the proposed SMCA design were modified to provide additional take allowances to accommodate NCTC and other non-federally recognized tribes, the proposal would further diverge from the MPA's ability to meet the ecological goals stated in the petition (MLPA Goals 1 and 2). Designing the MPA to meet ecological objectives would require an SMCA design with at least a Moderate-high LOP or an SMR, but these designations would further limit tribal take, including take associated with any cultural or subsistence practices, unless a federally-recognized tribe seeks, and CFGC approves, a tribal take exemption. Current legislative and regulatory frameworks provide pathways for tribal take exemptions for federally recognized tribes (25 C.F.R. § 83, Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14 § 632, subd. (a)(11)). No such pathway exists for non-federally recognized tribes. Designation of an SMCPA, on the other hand, could recognize and protect the cultural significance of the area and complement BLM landside protection while maintaining existing fishing access. Such a designation could also support continued exploration of co-management opportunities and contribute to MPA Network achievement of Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Goals 3-6.

Local Ecological Significance

Consistent with the MLPA, California's existing system of MPAs was redesigned to increase its coherence and effectiveness for protecting the state's marine life, habitats, and ecosystems. Although the core MPA Network is designed as an interconnected series of backbone MPAs, there are also some MPAs that were established to address place-based needs, such as local "ecologically important areas and areas of key human interest" that may still contribute to the overall MPA Network (CDFW 2008). For example, Gerstle Cove SMR (0.01 sq. mi.) and Natural Bridges State Marine Reserve (0.25 sq. mi.)

were established to protect locally significant rocky intertidal habitats without serving as MPA backbones. Similarly, Matlahuayl SMR (1.04 sq. mi.) was retained in the MPA Network to encompass an ecologically important area that has been protected since 1929. Given that “individual MPAs may serve varied primary purposes while collectively achieving the overall goals and guidelines” of the MLPA (Fish & G. Code, § 2857, subd. (c)), establishment of a new MPA could be appropriate where there is compelling rationale for localized protection or evidence that the area encompasses unique marine resources or processes that are not adequately represented in the existing MPA Network (Goal 4).

The ecological significance of Point Sal is currently recognized by several marine and terrestrial designations. The proposed new Point Sal SMCA would be within the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. National Marine Sanctuaries are areas designated to protect nationally significant natural, cultural, and historical resources. BLM manages the Point Sal promontory (headland) as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern due to its fragile ecosystems, wildlife, and cultural resources¹³. The Santa Barbara County Parks Department manages the 130 acres of Point Sal land conserved by The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, including trails, wetlands, and coastal habitats¹⁴. Point Sal State Beach, a California State Park, encompasses about 80 acres, including a little over one and a half miles of shoreline, onshore of the proposed Point Sal SMCA¹⁵. This location presents a potential opportunity to have a land and sea connection with onshore and offshore ecological protected areas.

Several characteristics contribute to the ecological significance of the Point Sal area. It occurs near a marine biogeographic transition zone associated with Point Conception, where cold-temperate and warm-temperate species of the northeastern Pacific overlap (Cudaback et al. 2005, Pitz et al. 2020, Kumar et al. 2021, Miller 2023). Species and communities that are characteristic of both northern and southern California co-occur in this region, contributing to high biodiversity and ecological complexity. The diverse mosaic of habitats found in the area include rocky intertidal, shallow and deep rocky reef, and extensive sandy bottom in both the shallow and deeper subtidal. This habitat diversity supports a broad range of species, including rockfish and invertebrates associated with rocky reef, and demersal species occupying sandy substrates (NCCOS 2007, NOAA 2008, Raimondi et al. 1999). Offshore rocks, including Lion Rock, provide important haul-out habitat for pinnipeds and roosting or breeding habitat for seabirds, while surrounding waters are used by a variety of marine mammals for foraging and migration (Mason et al. 2007, Capitolo et al. 2011, Robinette and Acosta 2011, Capitolo et al.

¹³ <https://www.blm.gov/visit/point-sal>

¹⁴ <https://www.sblandtrust.org/land/point-sal-santa-maria-area/>

¹⁵ [Point Sal State Beach](#)

2012, Robinette et al. 2012, Robinette et al. 2013, Santora and Sydemann 2015, CDFW OSPR 2018, NMFS 2024, USSF 2025).

The petition identified localized concerns regarding disturbance to pinnipeds and seabirds using Lion Rock, which is located within the proposed SMCA boundaries. MPA designation affects take of living, geological, or cultural resources but does not limit public access, boating, or anchoring. Given that marine mammals are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and take of seabirds is generally not permitted, MPA designation is unlikely to provide additional protection to these species. If disturbance to these populations is a primary concern, a Special Closure designation, which restricts access to the waters in the immediate vicinity of Lion Rock, would be a more appropriate management approach. CFGC can designate a Special Closure to prohibit access or restrict boating activities in waters adjacent to seabird rookeries or marine mammal haul-out sites. The Feasibility Guidelines state, a “Special Closures should only be proposed if other state and federal regulations are inadequate to provide protections to marine species. Proposed Special Closures should include information on the rationale behind the proposal, species involved, and specific information on why other existing state and federal protections (including the establishment of an MPA) are not adequate.” (CDFW 2010). CDFW does not have site-specific data documenting that other state and federal protections are not adequate to protect birds and pinnipeds in this area but wanted to identify this designation as the appropriate designation to offer additional protections for birds and/or pinnipeds. CFGC has established 14 Special Closures for relatively small, discrete marine areas to achieve the goals of the MLPA (CDFW 2016).

The waters in this area exhibit particularly complex oceanographic dynamics (Cudaback et al. 2005, Kumar et al. 2021). Local circulation and retention patterns are influenced by the promontory, which in turn affects the transport of larvae and nutrients and contributes to broader regional connectivity patterns (Wing et al. 1995, Graham and Largier 1997, Mace and Morgan 2006). Studies of seabird foraging at Point Sal suggest the headland may concentrate juvenile fish in the lee relative to adjacent open-coast areas (Ford et al. 2004, NCCOS 2005, Robinette et al. 2019), indicating that local conditions contribute to high productivity supporting a diverse food web that includes marine mammals and seabirds.

Among the biodiversity in the Point Sal region are several threatened or endangered marine species known to visit seasonally and/or have critical habitat in the area. These include blue whale, *Balaenoptera musculus*; humpback whale, *Megaptera novaeangliae*; southern sea otter, *Enhydra lutris*; leatherback sea turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*; and black abalone, *Haliotis cracherodii* (CDFW OSPR 2018). Both blue and humpback whales are listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), while the southern sea otter is listed as threatened under the ESA. The leatherback sea turtle and

black abalone are both listed as endangered under the federal ESA and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) are protected as an endangered species under ESA and CESA, while Western snowy plover (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*) is listed as threatened under ESA. By providing seasonal sanctuary and safeguarding critical habitat for these species, designating a new highly protected MPA at Point Sal would advance Goal 2 of the MLPA, which explicitly aims to "help sustain, conserve, and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted." During the South Coast planning process, the Science Advisory Team (SAT) provided the following guidance, "any protection given to [highly mobile forage species such as anchovies, squid, and krill] will ultimately translate into added marine bird and mammal protection" (MLPAI 2009). Thus, an argument could be made that MPA protection of important forage species in this location could offer indirect benefits to these populations by protecting forage species, particularly during breeding and/or nesting seasons when animals are foraging close to shore (Micheli et al. 2005, Villamoor and Becerro 2012, Eger and Baum 2020).

Portions of the biogeographic transition zone surrounding Point Sal are protected in the 32.9-sq. mi. Vandenberg SMR and the 22.5-sq. mi. Point Conception SMR, located 10.4 and 33.2 miles south, respectively, from the proposed Point Sal SMCA. Additionally, VSFB and Vandenberg SMR may offer the same land and sea connection with onshore and offshore ecological protected areas, as the VSFB restricts terrestrial access, although the nature and extent of the impacts of military activities on these protected areas is unknown. Several ecological processes and features discussed in the petition, including coastal upwelling, krill hotspots, and marine mammal foraging and migration areas, occur at regional scales that extend far beyond the proposed SMCA's boundaries. Lastly, while there is a larval retention zone in the area, the significance and magnitude of the potential larval contributions derived from protecting this area are unknown.

Section II of Feasibility Guidelines (MLPA Goals, Regional Objectives and Site-Specific Rationale; CDFW 2010) state that the proposed goals and regional objectives should be consistent with SAT Scientific Guidelines and that the objectives identified for each MPA should be consistent with the design and the allowed take. Ultimately, the goals described in the petition, including to "protect this rich and productive ecosystem and biodiversity found within" and "protect an important larval retention zone and enhance the connectivity dynamics within the region," are ecological objectives associated with higher levels of protection (i.e., MLPA Goals 1 and 2). A Moderate-low SMCA would not contribute to habitat replication within the MPA Network and relative to an SMR, has a lower probability of enhancing MPA Network connectivity, as described in the SAT Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process. Consequently, if CFGC determines that establishment of an additional MPA at Point Sal is warranted to achieve

these ecological objectives, a designation providing at least a Moderate-high Level of Protection (LOP) would more closely align with those objectives.

Habitat Protection and Network Design

The Point Sal area is ecologically valuable and there are benefits to siting MPAs near terrestrial protected areas. However, the available information does not demonstrate how designation of a new partial take SMCA at this location would meaningfully improve the structure or function of the existing MPA Network or achieve the site-specific ecological goals sought by the petitioner. As noted above, three of the four goals of the proposed MPA are to protect the productive ecosystem and rich biodiversity found locally, as well as to protect the larval retention zone and support the broader connectivity dynamics region wide. These objectives are consistent with MLPA Goals 1, 2, and 6, but the proposed design conflicts with meeting those stated objectives. First, as noted above, according to the SAT Science Guidelines, MLPA Goals 1 and 2 should not be attributed to an MPA having an assigned LOP below Moderate-high. Second, MLPA Goal 6 is to ensure that MPAs are designed, to the extent possible, as a component of a statewide network. While the proposed MPA would include a range of habitat types, these habitats are not currently underrepresented within the existing MPA Network, and the petition does not demonstrate that additional protection at this location would address a specific deficiency in current MPA Network design.

The existing MPA Network meets the SAT Science Guidelines in this portion of the coast. MPAs that meet the minimum size threshold and one of the three highest LOPs (i.e., Very High, High, or Moderate-high) are referred to as backbone MPAs because they are considered to provide substantial ecological benefits to the connected MPA Network. Although the proposed Point Sal SMCA exceeds the minimum size threshold at 9.27 square miles, the proposed take allowance for recreational finfish by hook-and-line from shore corresponds to a Moderate-low LOP (see response to Question 13 for more information).

The Moderate-low LOP applies regardless of current levels of use or access. During the MLPA Initiative planning process, the SAT took a standardized and precautionary approach to applying LOPs across the state, including considering a maximum plausible intensity for any given proposed activity within MPAs. Point Sal State Beach is currently only accessible via the 12-mile round trip Point Sal Trail because the road has been closed since 2008, making access challenging. However, the petition states, "In addition to the designation of a new Point Sal SMCA, we urge the state to redouble its efforts to provide access to Point Sal State Beach by reopening Point Sal Road." Given the LOP is based on types of allowed activities rather than current or expected intensity of those uses, the proposed new SMCA would have a Moderate-low LOP to ensure consistency with the precautionary approach reflected in the SAT Science Guidelines. Thus, despite

the area's current remoteness and access challenges, it would be inconsistent to presume the proposed SMCA would function with a higher LOP or offer the same protection as an SMR. To achieve the petitioner's stated ecological and protection goals, the proposed MPA would need to be established as an SMR with a Very High LOP or as a highly protected SMCA (at least Moderate-high LOP). Otherwise, the MPA as proposed would not qualify as a backbone MPA and thus would not improve alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines or contribute toward MLPA Goals 1 and 2. Inconsistent application of the precautionary approach used to develop SAT Science Guidelines risks undermining the scientific foundation of the statewide MPA Network.

The petition indicates that the proposed MPA would protect kelp beds within the proposed boundaries; however, available CDFW aerial survey data and satellite imagery do not indicate persistent kelp canopy in the proposed location. According to the petitioners, the proposed action is also intended to contribute to habitat replication for hard and soft bottom habitats in the 0-30 m and 30-100 m depth zones. To contribute to habitat replication, an MPA must be a backbone MPA and contain enough of a specific habitat to capture 90% of the biodiversity associated with that habitat. This minimum amount varies by habitat and is determined from biological surveys. The proposed Point Sal SMCA does not meet the LOP criteria to be a backbone MPA and consequently would not contribute to replication of any habitats in the MPA Network (Table 2). If the MPA was proposed with at least a Moderate-high LOP, it would meet the LOP criteria to be a backbone MPA and would add habitat replication for rocky intertidal, beach, and nearshore soft bottom habitat. However, these three habitats are well represented and spaced in the existing MPA Network. The closest replicates of all three habitats are found in the Point Buchon SMR/SMCA cluster 19.4 miles north and Vandenberg SMR 10.4 miles south of the proposed new Point Sal SMCA. These existing backbone MPAs are spaced 32.5 miles apart, well within the recommended maximum distance range of 31-62 miles. Thus, it is unclear whether the proposed Moderate-low SMCA at Point Sal would provide any additional ecological benefits beyond those achieved through the existing science-based design.

The petition also suggests that the proposed MPA would enhance larval retention and connectivity. Analyses of the MPA Network have found that the existing MPA Network as designed is functioning effectively, with existing MPAs shown to be both demographically and environmentally connected (CDFW 2022, Yeager et al. 2023). For example, Yeager et al. (2023) state their results suggest, "there is high sub-network connectivity in the different habitats in the system (i.e., high MPA-to-MPA environmental connectivity) and that [California] MPAs were generally placed in locations favored to receive high levels of propagule replenishment based on environmental transport alone." A reevaluation of MPA Network-wide connectivity using up-to-date average ocean circulation is intended for inclusion in the next DMR to support future assessments of regional connectivity and

MPA Network performance, but currently, this is a data gap. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of MPA Network connectivity (DMR Recommendation 23), site specific data gaps in nearshore habitat mapping and species data in specific locations would need to be filled and incorporated into existing connectivity modeling efforts.

Future Stressors and Climate Resilience

The petition identifies mitigation of climate change and other future stressors as primary rationale for establishing a new partial take MPA at Point Sal, including a stated objective to enhance the climate resilience of the broader MPA Network. While the petition cites climate-smart MPA design principles (Arafteh-Dalmau et al. 2023) and identifies ways in which the proposed SMCA is theoretically consistent with this guidance, it does not provide site-specific analyses to demonstrate the extent to which MPA designation at Point Sal would confer resilience based on this guidance at either the scale of the individual MPA or the MPA Network. In addition, much of the literature cited in support of climate resilience pertains to fully protected reserves, not partial take MPAs such as the proposed Point Sal SMCA (Barnett et al. 2015, Jacquemont et al. 2022).

While there are promising results in the scientific literature that MPAs may act as climate refugia for certain species and ecosystems and/or promote recovery following a climate-driven disturbance (Micheli et al. 2012, Carr et al. 2017, Roberts et al. 2017, Bates et al. 2019, CDFW 2022, Jacquemont et al. 2022, Raimondi and Smith 2022, Ziegler et al. 2023, Benedetti-Cecchi et al. 2024, Kumagai et al. 2024, Olguín-Jacobson et al. 2025, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025), the current state of knowledge indicates that MPAs do not consistently or predictably confer resilience to climate change (Coleman et al. 2017, Bruno et al. 2018, Freedman et al. 2020, Kyprioti et al. 2021, Smith et al. 2023, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). The DMR showed that habitats and species both inside and outside MPAs experienced dramatic changes following the 2014-2016 marine heatwave. However, some habitats, such as rocky intertidal and kelp forests, were more stable and showed some resiliency to the effects of the heatwave, and some of this stability could be attributed to higher connectivity (CDFW 2022, Carr et al. 2022, Raimondi et al. 2022). Yet these results were variable, and highly dependent on bioregion and shifts in oceanographic conditions pre- and post-heatwave (CDFW 2022, Carr et al. 2022, Caselle et al. 2023, Hamilton et al. 2023).

Therefore, while MPAs may indirectly support climate resilience under certain conditions, an MPA explicitly intended to serve this function should be supported by evidence demonstrating how it would contribute to resilience at the site and MPA Network scales. Without this information, it is difficult to evaluate whether the proposed action would achieve the function the petitioners envision. Further exploration of climate change resiliency and the role of MPA design will be guided by the DMR recommendations

focused on MPA Network performance (CDFW 2022) and the recommendations put forth in the “Climate Resilience and California’s Marine Protected Area Network” report (Hofmann et al. 2021).

Coastal development and other future stressors are also identified as considerations supporting establishment of the proposed SMCA. While an SMCA designation would prohibit take incidental to new construction and therefore would limit development within the footprint of the MPA itself, this would have no bearing on the development of neighboring areas. Neither coastal nor offshore (past the 3 nautical mile state waters boundary, the maximum extent of any state MPA) development is regulated by state MPAs. Existing MPAs are sited adjacent to areas that have experienced or are likely to experience coastal and offshore development, illustrating that MPA designation does not in itself regulate these activities beyond MPA boundaries. As a result, the relationship between the proposed designation and the mitigation of these stressors is unclear.

Equity and Access

The proposed action is framed in the petition as an opportunity to enhance equitable access to marine resources for nearby disadvantaged communities, particularly when combined with broader efforts to improve access and connection to nature. While MPAs may enhance numerous non-consumptive recreational opportunities, the petition does not convey the mechanism by which designation of a new MPA at this location would improve access or result in more equitable access for disadvantaged communities to marine resources.

The area provides many opportunities for human connection with the ocean through non-consumptive activities such as swimming, surfing, beach combing, and wildlife viewing. Understanding how people interact with and derive benefits from the ocean and how these benefits may be affected by MPAs is challenging (Hall-Arber et. al. 2021, CDFW 2022, Travis et al. 2026). Social science research within the MPA Monitoring Program is a rapidly expanding field of MPA research, as well as a priority DMR Recommendation to invest in improving understanding of the human dimensions of MPAs and develop a human dimensions working group and research agenda (DMR Recommendation 12).

Physical access to Point Sal has historically been, and continues to be, limited due to its remote location, hazardous nearshore conditions, and treacherous cliffs. The primary access route is via the approximately 12-mile round trip Point Sal Trail, which presents a significant barrier to visitation for many users. Offshore, boating access is often dependent on weather and ocean conditions. Beyond this, there are frequently additional barriers for people from disadvantaged communities who want to access the coast, particularly from shore or boat (Christensen and King 2017, USFWS 2024). It is unclear how MPA designation in this area would increase access for disadvantaged

communities. The underlying connection appears to be that increased regulatory protection would make the ocean healthier and more productive, which would then provide benefits to nearby marginalized or disadvantaged communities, such as by enhancing shore-based recreational activities. However, this relationship is not clearly supported in the petition or in the scientific literature for the marine environment in California. MPA designation alone does not increase physical access, reduce barriers to participation, or directly address the socioeconomic factors that influence equitable access to coastal resources. The petition also does not address the extent to which nearby communities already utilize the area or the potential consequences to those same communities of restricting many of the uses currently allowed under existing regulations.

Impacts to Fisheries and Socioeconomic Impacts

Consistent with directives in the Fish and Game Code and 2016 Master Plan for MPAs (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2853 & 2855, CDFW 2016), decisions regarding the siting of new MPAs and major modifications of existing MPAs must consider relevant information including, but not limited to, the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of various alternatives. Given the scope and timeline of this analysis, and data availability, CDFW was able to conduct a preliminary assessment but did not conduct an in-depth analysis of the economic or fiscal impacts for the proposed new MPA. The proposed Point Sal SMCA has the potential to adversely impact the commercial nearshore groundfish¹⁶ fishery, Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV)¹⁷ fleet, and private boat anglers operating out of Port San Luis in Avila Beach and Morro Bay.

The proposed SMCA overlaps with Commercial Fishing Blocks (fishing blocks) 631 and 632. In the years since the MPA Network was fully implemented (2013-2025), these two blocks yielded approximately \$191,000 and \$3.2 million worth of commercial nearshore groundfish caught by all allowed gear types (Figure 1; for more details on all commercial fishery value data, see the CDFW [Marine Fisheries Data Explorer](#)). The combined value of approximately \$3.4 million makes up 22% of commercial nearshore groundfish landings

¹⁶ For a list of all nearshore groundfish, see the California Nearshore Fishery Management Plan (CDFW 2002). Representative nearshore groundfish from the surrounding area of the proposed new MPA include cabezon, *Scorpaenichthys marmoratus*; California scorpionfish, *Scorpaena guttata*; California sheephead, *Bodianus pulcher*; black rockfish, *Sebastes melanops*; black-and-yellow rockfish, *S. chrysomelas*; blue rockfish, *S. mystinus*; brown rockfish, *S. auriculatus*, calico rockfish, *S. dalli*; China rockfish, *S. nebulosus*; copper rockfish, *S. caurinus*; gopher rockfish, *S. carnatus*; grass rockfish, *S. rastrelliger*; kelp rockfish, *S. atrovirens*; olive rockfish, *S. serranoides*; quillback rockfish, *S. maliger*; treefish, *S. serriceps*; kelp greenling, *Hexagrammos decagrammus*; rock greenling, *H. lagocephalus*; and monkeyface prickleback, *Cebidichthys violaceus*.

¹⁷ The CPFV fleet takes paying passengers to recreationally fish at offshore coastal locations.

for the nearby ports of Morro Bay and Port San Luis combined. Consequently, establishing a new MPA at Point Sal has the potential to have adverse impacts on the commercial nearshore groundfish fishery due to the potential loss of fishing grounds within the proposed SMCA boundaries. For all commercial landings in the area, Morro Bay Harbor alone accounted for over half of the landing records (60.3%).

Furthermore, while the area is not readily accessible for shore-based anglers due to a long hike to the site, CPFVs and private boaters operating out of Morro Bay area ports (Port San Luis, Morro Bay Harbor, and San Simeon) frequent the area, especially during periods of rough weather when other fishing options are not available. Since the MPA Network was fully implemented in 2012 (between 2013 and 2025), there were a total of 702 CPFV trips to blocks 631 and 632. During this period, there was an average 12.4 (± 10.7 SD) CPFV trips per year to block 631, and an average 49.2 (± 21 SD) CPFV trips per year to block 632 (Figure 2). These two blocks account for 12.8% of all CPFV trips out of Morro Bay area ports during that time frame. Thus, restricting boat-based fishing access within the proposed new Point Sal SMCA has the potential to have adverse economic impacts on the CPFV fleet (see response to Question 15 for additional details). Spatial trends in average catch per angler between 2016 and 2024 from the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS)¹⁸ also indicate the area is heavily used by private boaters (Figure 3).

Additionally, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, operates a fisheries observer program on CPFVs based out of Port San Luis; this program collects data to support federal stock assessments for rockfishes (*Sebastes* spp.). Prohibiting boat-based fishing in this area has high potential to impact the quality of those assessments. For more detailed information, see response to Question 15.

The addition of a new MPA in this area would likely result in socioeconomic impacts, including to fisheries and the surrounding communities, although the full extent of these impacts is unknown (see Question 5 in Attachment 1). A thorough analysis of socioeconomic and fiscal impacts was outside the scope of the 2023 MPA petition process.

¹⁸ CRFS conducts angler-intercept surveys of catch, effort, and location across multiple fishing modes. For the private/rental boat fishing mode, angler-intercept surveys are conducted at launch ramps, boat hoists, and boat rental locations where the public (from a subset of fishing trips) is intercepted to collect information on fish caught and released, biological data on kept catch, and approximate fishing location(s). Fishing locations are at the level of micro fishing blocks (approximately 1 x 1 square miles). Thus, spatial CRFS catch-per-angler data reflects the distribution of fish caught and kept per angler on this surveyed subset of trips.

Historical Context: MLPA Initiative Planning Process

An MPA at Point Sal was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process, but it was deliberately not included in the final adopted MPA Network. Package 3, one of three MPA arrays developed internally by the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (CCRSG), and Package AC, developed externally¹⁹ by NRDC (co-sponsors of the petition) and Point Blue Conservation Science, both proposed SMRs at Point Sal with footprints similar to the SMCA proposed in this petition. The other two CCRSG array packages did not include an MPA near Point Sal. Each of the groups responsible for development of MPA packages noted difficulties in determining the extent to protect the area's three main headlands (i.e., Point Sal, Purisima Point, and Point Arguello) while minimizing socioeconomic impacts (MLPAI 2006). For example, in their second revision, the proponents of Package 2 included an MPA at Purisima Point (Vandenberg SMR) but not at Point Sal or Point Arguello, stating that they chose to leave "several major headland areas outside of MPA protection to facilitate scientific comparison and to minimize socioeconomic impacts." As part of the rationale for including an MPA at Purisima Point, the group said that the "proposed SMR is designed to leave the area around Point Sal (which is more easily accessible from port and therefore more heavily fished) open to fishing activities."

The developers of Package 3, which was billed as a "hybrid" array that united myriad, sometimes opposing, perspectives, originally included an MPA at Purisima Point. In their second revision, they stated, "In response to the feedback from the SAT, the group . . . exchanged a proposed SMR at Purisima Point for an SMR at Point Sal to address spacing concerns." Following several iterations of refinement and direction from the Blue Ribbon Task Force, a modified proposal, Package 3R, was jointly developed by MLPA Initiative staff, proponents of the original Package 3, and SAT members. This array was ultimately recommended as the preferred alternative, and included an SMR at Purisima Point, but not at Point Sal.

An MPA in this area was considered multiple times throughout the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven MLPA planning process and intentionally not adopted at that time. The socioeconomic considerations that informed this outcome likely remain relevant (see Impacts to Fisheries and Socioeconomic Impacts above and response to Question 15 for more information on potential consumptive impacts) and new information warranting revisiting this assessment has not been presented.

¹⁹ During the Central Coast region planning process, the SAT and MLPA Initiative staff evaluated externally generated proposals, in addition to arrays proposed by the CCRSG.

In addition to socioeconomic impact considerations, the ultimate decision to not adopt an MPA at Point Sal was also related to monitoring purposes. Point Sal was intended to function as an unprotected reference site for comparative monitoring in conjunction with Vandenberg SMR, just to the south (MLPAI 2006). While none of the core MPA long-term monitoring occurs at Point Sal, the site is an important monitoring area outside of MPAs for fisheries stock assessments. Establishing a new MPA at this site could affect those surveys (See Question 15 for more information).

Point Sal State Beach

As noted above, the proposed MPA is adjacent to Point Sal State Beach, which is managed by California State Parks, and other lands owned or managed by Santa Barbara County, BLM, and VSFB. The MMAIA recognized the benefits of protecting the land-sea connection by siting MPAs near terrestrial protected areas, stating that, “To maximize the benefits that can be gained from having connected protected areas, whenever an MMA is adjacent to a terrestrial protected area, the managing agencies shall coordinate their activities to the greatest extent possible to achieve the objectives of both areas” (Pub. Resources Code, § 36601, subd. (c)). Similarly, according to “State Parks Guidelines for Creating Marine Managed Areas” (CSP 2010),

“When an MPA is proposed offshore of an existing terrestrial California State Park System unit, the terrestrial park’s general plan²⁰ and existing public use patterns should be a guiding element for the designation and shoreline boundaries of the MPA.”

Accordingly, MPA designation would require resolution of conflicts with current State Parks management plans for these established terrestrial areas.

Point Sal State Beach is currently only accessible via the Point Sal Trail because Point Sal Road has been closed since 2008. As noted above, the petition recommends that the state work to reopen the road to provide beach access. However, encouraging increased visitation may not align with the General Plan for the State Beach, which identifies a number of logistical planning issues related to increasing access (e.g., safety and erosion, garbage receptacles and management, and restroom facilities). For instance, the Santa Barbara/Ventura Coastal State Park System General Plan for Point Sal State Beach discusses “Allowable Use Intensity”, stating,

“Due to the serious problems with slope stability and erosion, use intensity at Point Sal State Beach shall be kept at a low level by providing only minimal

²⁰ [California State Parks General Plans and Management Plans](#)

facilities necessary for public health and safety. Erosion of lands above the state beach property will probably always be a significant constraint to recreational use in the area, due to the steep nature of bluff and hillside slopes and associated soil characteristics.”

The proposed regulations for the Point Sal SMCA are another possible area of misalignment with the current management of the State Beach. In 1962, the then State Park Commission designated the park unit as a State Beach as defined in Pub. Resources Code, section 5019.56. State Beaches are defined as “consisting of areas with frontage on the ocean, or bays designed to provide swimming, boating, fishing, and other beach-oriented recreational activities.” The Point Sal SMCA as proposed would allow recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore, which aligns with the intent of the State Beach designation. However, other shore-based, recreational take of other resources (e.g., seaweed, crab, and mussels) would no longer be allowed. This limitation, including any further limitations to recreational harvest (i.e., establishment of an SMR or highly protected SMCA) would need to be considered in consultation with California State Parks.

The proposed change may also affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of other agencies, including Santa Barbara County, BLM, and VSFB. For additional details about VSFB, see the evaluation narrative below.

Vandenberg Space Force Base

The petitioners indicated that meetings with personnel from VSFB informed the submission of the November 2025 amended petition, which included moving the southern boundary approximately one mile north to “avoid conflicts with existing mission-critical operations of Vandenberg Space Force Base” and proposed including the following language in Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, section 632 for the new proposed SMCA:

1. *“Take incidental to base operations and commercial space launch operations identified by the Vandenberg Space Force Base Commander as mission critical is allowed.*
2. *“Public entry may be restricted at the discretion of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to protect wildlife, aquatic life, or habitat, or by the Commander of Vandenberg Space Force Base to protect and provide safety for base operations.*
3. *“The Department shall enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Commander of Vandenberg Space Force Base for the mutually beneficial management and administration of the Point Sal State Marine Conservation Area. The MOU shall include, but not be limited to, the*

identification of Vandenberg Space Force Base's national defense mission activities that are unrestricted by the subject regulations and details on management and administrative roles and responsibilities."

The request to add the proposed language regarding VSFB is not needed in Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632 because: (1) Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632, subd. (a) already includes provisions to accommodate "uses of the waters identified as marine protected areas, special closures, or the lands or waters adjacent to these designated areas by the Department of Defense, its allies or agents," including VSFB; (2) CDFW and VSFB have existing authorities to periodically restrict access to areas, so the language would be redundant; and (3) The directive for CDFW and VSFB to develop an MOU is non-regulatory and CDFW could work with VSFB to amend the existing MOU with VSFB that covers Vandenberg SMR if another MPA is established adjacent to the base.

Further, CDFW and VSFB currently have a valid MOU for Vandenberg SMR for the purpose of voluntary cooperation in clarifying the goals and objectives in the management and administration for Vandenberg SMR; protecting coastal and marine resources; and preserving essential military training, operational capabilities, and other mission critical activities. CDFW could work with VSFB to amend the existing MOU with VSFB that covers Vandenberg SMR if another MPA were established adjacent to the base.

Identified Information Gaps

Consistent with directives in the Fish and Game Code and 2016 Master Plan for MPAs (Fish & G. Code, §§2853 and 2855, CDFW 2016), decisions regarding the siting of new MPAs and major modifications of existing MPAs must consider relevant information including, but not limited to, the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of various alternatives. Given the scope and timeline of this analysis, as well as data availability, CDFW did not provide a supplemental analysis of the economic or fiscal impacts for the proposed new MPA (see Question 5 in Attachment 1), and this remains unresolved.

Potential effects of the proposed action on equity and access to marine resources for marginalized communities remain unknown. See response to Question 5 in the Companion Document for more information.

Several other important pieces of information are needed to provide an informed recommendation. As a baseline principle, any change to the MPA Network, including any proposed new MPAs, must be evaluated within the context of the entire MPA Network to determine how it benefits or complements existing regional protections.

First, CDFW considered this proposed change in context of the other proposed actions in the 14 other 2023 Bin 2 petitions. While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR have the most critical bearing on Point Sal because they are the only proposals in proximity to Point Sal that pose a net reduction in regional conservation. For example, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces no new backbone MPA; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries. In contrast, the petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. This has bearing on the assessment at Point Sal because the ecological contribution of any individual MPA depends in part on its relationship to surrounding MPAs; changes elsewhere in the MPA Network may influence how the effects of designating the proposed Point Sal SMCA are interpreted. This uncertainty highlights the challenges associated with evaluating individual MPA modifications in isolation, as changes to a single site can have implications for broader MPA Network performance. Second, while localized data shows that Point Sal is an important larval retention zone, a comprehensive evaluation of connectivity across the entire MPA Network is still forthcoming. The potential contributions to larval transport and connectivity of an SMCA at Point Sal are highlighted in the petition. While localized data suggest that Point Sal is an important larval retention zone, a reevaluation of MPA Network-wide connectivity using up-to-date average ocean circulation is intended for inclusion in the next DMR to support future assessments of regional connectivity and MPA Network performance, but currently, this is a data gap. Such an analysis, including one that incorporates the myriad of proposed changes from petitioners, was outside the scope of the petition process. This data gap is particularly relevant given the proximity of the proposed Point Sal SMCA to Vandenberg SMR, which is affected by petition 2023-18MPA and 2022-002 and currently functions as a vital regional backbone supporting connectivity for six key habitats in the region.

Ultimately, the data gaps and complexity associated with this location have precluded CDFW from providing CFGC a single recommendation for the regulatory request to establish a new MPA at Point Sal. In lieu of a recommendation, CDFW has compiled the information in the evaluation framework and provides the following options for CFGC to consider.

RECOMMENDATION FOR 2023-28MPA_AM2

Given these considerations, and the information in the evaluation below:

Support with an Alternative Pathway the non-regulatory request to advance co-management.

At the April 2026 CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, the tribe confirmed the intent is to pursue co-management with CDFW through non-regulatory means. CDFW may enter into tribal co-management agreements with tribes at any time and these do not require action from CFGC or consideration through CFGC's petition process or rulemaking.

The non-regulatory request to advance co-management is aligned with the state's commitments to strengthening and sustaining effective government to government relationships between the state and tribes (Governor Brown's Executive Order B-10-11, Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-15-19, the 2020 Ancestral Lands Policy, and the California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Stewardship Policy) and would advance the following DMR Recommendations: (1) Improve state agencies' tribal engagement and relationship building efforts, (2) Create a clear pathway to tribal MPA management, and (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network, which may lead to advancements in (3) Building tribal capacity to participate in MPA management activities (CDFW 2022).

Recognizing the deep cultural and historical ties of California Native American tribes to their ancestral lands and waters, and consistent with these priority recommendations from the DMR, CDFW is committed to exploring opportunities for co-management and co-stewardship of California's MPAs as well as within areas outside MPA boundaries with NCTC and other interested tribes. These opportunities may be initiated and developed through non-regulatory frameworks and agreements outside of the CFGC petition process and could likely occur on a faster timeline than through the adoption of new MPAs through the CFGC's regulatory process.

Regarding the regulatory request in 2023-28MPA_AM2 to establish a new SMCA around Point Sal that allows recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore,

CDFW was tasked with evaluating the 2023 Bin 2 MPA petitions using guidance from the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), Master Plan, DMR recommendations, and the approved evaluation framework. CDFW thoroughly evaluated this petition within the framework adopted by CFGC and presents the available information here. An MPA was considered at Point Sal during the MLPA Planning Process but was not selected, in part due to socioeconomic considerations. As proposed, the Point Sal MPA would not enhance MPA Network design beyond what the current MPA Network offers because of the Moderate-low Level of Protection (LOP). However, there are alternative designations that can be used to recognize the cultural significance of the location or that would offer greater ecological protections than the proposed SMCA, consistent with Science Advisory Team (SAT) Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process (i.e., SMR, Special Closure). The various designations (i.e., SMCA as proposed, SMCPA, MPA with

at least a Moderate-high LOP, and Special Closure) meet different objectives and there are tradeoffs among the alternatives that CFGC will need to consider (e.g., robust ecological protections would limit tribal take and recreational and commercial fishing) (See Table 1).

Given the considerations above and in the Evaluation Framework, CFGC could consider the following options:

1. **Support with Alternative Pathway:** Request CDFW engage with the NCTC, other interested tribes, and California State Parks to explore designating the area as a **State Marine Cultural Preservation Area** to acknowledge the cultural significance of the area, rather than establishing a new MPA.
2. **Grant with Alternative Pathway, Point Sal SMR or a SMCA with at least Moderate-high LOP:** Establish a new MPA at Point Sal and request CDFW identify northern and southern boundaries that are better aligned with Feasibility Guidelines rather than the proposed boundaries in 2023-28MPA_AM2.
3. **Grant with Alternative Pathway, Special Closure Lion Rock:** Establish a new Special Closure around Lion Rock for birds and pinnipeds. This alternative could be considered on its own or as an add-on to Options (1), (2), and (4).
4. **Grant in Concept Point Sal SMCA:** Establish a new SMCA at Point Sal as proposed in 2023-28MPA_AM2 that allows recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore (Moderate-low LOP) and request CDFW identify northern and southern boundaries that are better aligned with Feasibility Guidelines rather than the proposed boundaries in 2023-28MPA_AM2.
5. **Deny:** do not establish a new SMCA (or SMR or Special Closure) at Point Sal.

Finally, the petition included a request to “rename the Point Sal State Marine Conservation Area with a Chumash place name after further consultation with other Chumash Tribes in the region.” If CFGC grants a newly designated area, CDFW recommends CFGC work with NCTC and other tribes as appropriate to identify a name that aligns with CFGC’s Naming Protected Area Policy, which states, “When identifying the name for, or an opportunity to rename, a protected area, the Commission and Department will invite tribes with ancestral ties to that area to engage in meaningful information-sharing about the cultural significance of the area, and to identify traditional or contemporary tribal names for the area. In selecting a name, the Commission will give significant weight to tribally-identified names, with particular emphasis on restoring tribal place names. In its selection, the Commission may consider combining the tribal place name with a currently used name that is understandable and locatable, as appropriate, to ensure accessibility and identification by the broader public while restoring tribal heritage recognition.”

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

2023-28MPA_AM2: Designate a New SMCA Near Point Sal with an Allowance for Recreational Take of Finfish by Hook-and-Line From Shore

Responses to the Evaluation Questions below only pertain to the proposed regulatory request in the petition to create a new SMCA around Point Sal that allows recreational take of finfish by hook-and-line from shore.

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

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

The petitioners have proposed a new SMCA near Point Sal with an allowance for recreational take of finfish from shore by hook-and-line. These regulations would result in a Moderate-low LOP for the proposed MPA (see response to Question 9 for more details). The petitioner notes that the proposed MPA would align with MLPA Goals 1, 2, 3, and 6, related to preserving natural diversity and marine natural heritage, protecting marine populations and habitats, improving recreational opportunities, and managing MPAs as a cohesive MPA Network. However, as proposed, the Point Sal SMCA is unlikely to benefit the MPA Network or address a current or emerging MPA management challenge that has emerged since the DMR.

Section II of Feasibility Guidelines (MLPA Goals, Regional Objectives and Site-Specific Rationale; CDFW 2010) state that the proposed goals and regional objectives should be consistent with SAT Scientific Guidelines and that the objectives identified for each MPA should be consistent with the design and the allowed take. Broadly, the minimal LOP is incompatible with the achievement of ecological goals, such as the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem function (Goal 1) or the conservation of marine life populations (Goal 2), because it would prevent the proposed SMCA from functioning as a

backbone MPA. It would also preclude contribution to MPA Network design goals, such as habitat replication (Goal 4) or MPA Network connectivity (Goal 6). Therefore, the stated objectives are not aligned with the proposed design or with SAT Science Guidelines (Goal 5).

Consistent with the MLPA, California's prior system of MPAs was redesigned to increase its coherence and effectiveness for protecting the state's marine life, habitats, and ecosystems. Although the MPA Network is designed as an interconnected series of MPAs, there are also some MPAs that were established to address place-based needs while still contributing to other goals of the overall system. For example, Gerstle Cove SMR (0.01 sq. mi.) and Natural Bridges State Marine Reserve (0.25 sq. mi.) were established to protect locally significant rocky intertidal habitats without serving as MPA backbones. Similarly, Matlahuayl SMR (1.04 sq. mi.) was retained in the MPA Network to encompass an ecologically important area that has been protected since 1929. Therefore, a new MPA at Point Sal could be established if there is significant rationale for localized protection or evidence that the area encompasses unique marine resources or processes that are not well represented in the existing MPA Network (Goal 4) and the allowed uses are consistent with the intended protections. However, there are data gaps (see Question 5), and it is unclear whether the area warrants localized protection, or whether the area encompasses unique marine resources or processes that are not well represented in the existing MPA Network. If there is rationale for localized protection, the LOP of the MPA would need to be at least Moderate-high to offer that protection.

However, potential ecological gains must be weighed against other MLPA Goals. The MPA Network was intentionally designed to balance conservation benefits with the needs of coastal communities and diverse ocean users, including fisheries (Goal 3). A stated goal of establishing the proposed SMCA is to enhance shore-based recreation and improve access to marine resources and fishing opportunities for nearby disadvantaged communities. This is aligned with Goal 3, however, the rationale underpinning the petition's stated relationship between MPA designation and improvements in recreational opportunities, access, or equity is not clearly demonstrated. While the petition suggests that additional MPAs can promote equitable access when paired with initiatives to increase ocean connections, it is unclear what distinct role the MPA itself would play beyond what these initiatives could achieve independently. The petition also notes that the SMCA would expand access to marine resources and fishing opportunities due to the proximity of a popular shore fishing site north of the proposed boundary; however, the site is already open to fishing and recreating and so the rationale for how MPA establishment would decrease barriers and increase accessibility is not evident.

The SMCA as proposed could be managed and enforced as part of the MPA Network, but the stated objectives do not align with SAT Science Guidelines (Goal 5). As

recommended in studies cited in the petition, the ecological and climate resilience outcomes envisioned by the petitioner would be more effectively achieved through fully or highly protected reserves rather than minimally protected areas (Barnett et al. 2015, Jacquemont et al. 2022).

Lastly, the MLPA Initiative planning process set a clear precedent for creating and managing California's MPAs as a cohesive MPA Network through a long-term, robust, science-based, stakeholder-driven process (Goal 6). In line with this foundation, the MPA Network should continue to be evaluated as an integrated system, as piecemeal modifications can have consequences that extend beyond the boundaries of a single MPA. CDFW considered this proposed change in context of the other proposed actions in the 14 other 2023 Bin 2 petitions. While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR have the most critical bearing on Point Sal because they are the only proposals in proximity to Point Sal that pose a net reduction in regional conservation. The petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. In contrast, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces no new backbone MPA; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries.

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

Yes. The establishment of the MPA alone does not advance DMR recommendations; however, the additional requests to co-manage the area with NCTC and other interested tribes is a pathway to advance adaptive management Recommendations 1, 2, and 24 from the DMR (CDFW 2022): (1) Improve state agencies tribal engagement and relationship building efforts; (2) Create a clear pathway to tribal MPA management; and (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network, which may lead to advancements on Recommendation (3) Build tribal capacity to participate in MPA management activities.

The petition states that, "Protecting the marine waters and coastal resources of Point Sal would help to recognize its value as a cultural heritage site that still contributes to the identity, sense of place, and cultural and subsistence practices for many of the Indigenous people of Central California today." However, the Point Sal SMCA as proposed would limit NCTC's and other tribes' ability to continue subsistence practices and cultural harvest other than hook-and-line fishing for finfish from shore, including shore-based recreational take of other species (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crabs and

mussels), and all offshore and boat-based fishing. Designating the area as a SMCPA is an alternative pathway that could be explored to acknowledge the cultural significance of the area without limiting subsistence practices. Additionally, CDFW could work with NCTC to advance these DMR recommendations, including developing a co-management agreement for this area. See Question 2a of Attachment 1 for the DMR and adaptive management Recommendations.

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

Not applicable, as the proposed change advances adaptive management recommendations.

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

Yes. The proposed expansion overlaps with Administrative Kelp Bed 202, which is leasable, and Administrative Kelp Bed 203, which is closed. Kelp can be commercially harvested within leasable kelp beds until a lease is obtained for the bed, at which time the bed can only be harvested by the lease holder. Closed kelp beds prohibit all commercial kelp harvesting. Commercial kelp harvest has not been reported in these beds.

The proposed change also has the potential to impact three existing Experimental Fishing Permits (EFPTs): EFPT2-002 (Dungeness crab/rock crab), and EFPT2-004 (Dungeness crab).

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

Yes. The proposed Point Sal MPA would be inside the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, which is federally administered by the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration. Implementation of the proposed change would require consultation and coordination with federal authorities and may interact with their management activities.

There is an ongoing data gathering effort in this area that supports federal rockfish stock assessments by providing an index of relative abundance, and length and age composition data (see response to Question 15 related to potential impacts to non-consumptive activities). Federal stock assessments that include data collected from within the boundaries of the proposed Point Sal SMCA include the 2015 Bocaccio

assessment (He et al. 2015), the 2015 China Rockfish assessment (Dick et al. 2016), the 2017 Bocaccio assessment (He and Field 2018), and the 2019 combined Gopher and Black-and-Yellow Rockfish assessment (Monk and He 2019). Such assessments are in turn used by the Pacific Fishery Management Council to manage fish stocks by setting legal catch limits and shares. Implementing the proposed Point Sal SMCA would require a Scientific Collecting Permit to conduct hook-and-line fishing in the SMCA to continue to collect data for this purpose, which could diminish the numbers of fish permitted for take. The new MPA is likely to reduce the availability of fishery-dependent data from this area, which has potential to confound assessment results for some species into the future. It is unclear how the proposed change would affect National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration management activities related to federal groundfish.

The Point Sal SMCA, as proposed, would limit NCTC's and other tribes' ability to continue boat-based subsistence practices and other shore-based fishing or cultural harvest of invertebrates and algae. It is unclear how the proposed change may affect other tribal management and monitoring activities.

The proposed MPA is adjacent to terrestrial protected areas, including Point Sal State Beach, which is managed by California State Parks, and other lands owned or managed by Santa Barbara County, BLM, and VSFB. The proposed change may have the potential to affect existing regulations, permits, leases, or management activities of Santa Barbara County, BLM, and VSFB. For additional details about VSFB, see the evaluation narrative above.

With respect to Point Sal State Beach, coordination with California State Parks would be required to ensure alignment with their management activities. According to "State Parks Guidelines for Creating Marine Managed Areas" (CSP 2010),

"When an MPA is proposed offshore of an existing terrestrial California State Park System unit, the terrestrial park's general plan (http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21299) and existing public use patterns should be a guiding element for the designation and shoreline boundaries of the MPA."

Several aspects of the petition would require resolution of conflicts with current State Parks management plans for these established terrestrial areas. For example, Point Sal State Beach is currently only accessible via the Point Sal Trail because the road has been closed since 2008. The petition states, "In addition to the designation of a new Point Sal SMCA, we urge the state to redouble its efforts to provide access to Point Sal State Beach by reopening Point Sal Road."

However, increased access may not be aligned with California State Parks' management plan for the area. The Santa Barbara/Ventura Coastal State Park System General Plan for Point Sal State Beach discusses "Allowable Use Intensity", stating,

"Due to the serious problems with slope stability and erosion, use intensity at Point Sal State Beach shall be kept at a low level by providing only minimal facilities necessary for public health and safety. Erosion of lands above the state beach property will probably always be a significant constraint to recreational use in the area, due to the steep nature of bluff and hillside slopes and associated soil characteristics."

Additionally, in 1962, the then State Park Commission designated the park unit as a State Beach as defined in Pub. Resources Code, section 5019.56. State Beaches are defined as "consisting of areas with frontage on the ocean, or bays designed to provide swimming, boating, fishing, and other beach-oriented recreational activities." As proposed, the Point Sal SMCA would align with existing shore-based finfish fishing by hook-and-line²¹, but would limit other types of shore-based recreational take (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crab and mussels), and recreational boat fishing. These additional limitations to recreational harvest would need to be considered in consultation with California State Parks. The proposed change would also require CDFW and California State Parks to coordinate on enforcement, updates to signage, and outreach efforts.

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

²¹ Other MPA designations that would prohibit shore-based recreational fishing (i.e., an SMR or highly protected SMCA) would need to be considered in consultation with California State Parks.

magnitude of the State Water Resources Control Board's workload and the cost of compliance for permittees is unknown.

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

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

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

- MLPA planning documents and related information (e.g., MLPA Goals and MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives),
- Current research on MPA connectivity and climate resilience,
- State efforts to improve relationships with California Native American tribes,
- Literature and agency documents on local ecological significance,
- California State Parks Management Plans
- Habitat data in a Geographic Information System, and
- Commercial and recreational fishing data, such as that available through the [Marine Fisheries Data Explorer](#) tool.

CDFW has identified information gaps that limit the ability to fully evaluate the proposed change, primarily:

- Tribal concerns and interests of all affected tribes related to the establishment of a new MPA at this location.
- Effect of the proposed action on equity and access to marine resources for marginalized communities. Broadly, there are information gaps related to assessing issues regarding equity and access for traditionally underserved communities with the existing MPA Network as well as the proposed changes in the 2023 MPA petitions.
- Site specific data demonstrating how a partial take MPA would enhance productivity of the larval retention zone beyond current conditions or the potential added local value or value to the MPA Network through establishing a place-based MPA.
- Evaluation of connectivity across the entire MPA Network.
 - The potential contributions to larval transport and connectivity of an SMCA at Point Sal are highlighted in the petition. While localized data suggest that Point Sal is an important larval retention zone, a reevaluation of MPA

Network-wide connectivity using up-to-date average ocean circulation is intended for inclusion in the next DMR to support future assessments of regional connectivity and MPA Network performance, but currently, this is a data gap. This data gap is particularly relevant given the proximity of the proposed Point Sal SMCA to Vandenberg SMR, which is affected by petitions 2023-18MPA and 2022-002 and currently functions as a vital regional backbone supporting connectivity for 6 key habitats in the region.

- Site specific data that demonstrates the need to protect the area in a Special Closure for birds or pinnipeds beyond what existing protections offer (e.g., Marine Mammal Protection Act; California least tern have protections as an endangered species under both ESA and CESA).
- More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to resilience across different species, habitats, and regions and how to best support these benefits. This is DMR Prioritized Recommendation (25), Develop and implement climate change research and monitoring priorities and metrics for California's MPA Network.
- The outcomes of petitions 2023-18MPA and 2022-002 are pending and could result in MPA Network-scale implications that have bearing on the assessment of a new MPA in Point Sal.
 - While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR have the most critical bearing on Point Sal because they are the only proposals in proximity to Point Sal that pose a net reduction in regional conservation. The petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. In contrast, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces no new backbone MPA; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries.
 - Located just 10.42 miles south of the proposed Point Sal SMR boundary, Vandenberg SMR is currently California's largest mainland MPA and serves as a vital regional backbone by protecting critical habitats including kelp, beach, rocky intertidal, hard substrate (0-30 m depth), and soft substrate (0-30 and 30-100 m depths). Petitions 2023-18MPA and 2022-002 propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would reduce the SMR's LOP and alter its contribution to habitat replication and connectivity in the region. The ecological contribution of an individual MPA depends in part on its relationship with surrounding MPAs. Consequently, this pending decision introduces uncertainty regarding future MPA Network performance and therefore limits the ability to fully evaluate MPA Network-

scale implications of the proposed Point Sal SMCA. This uncertainty highlights the challenges associated with evaluating individual MPA modifications in isolation, as changes to a single site can have implications for broader MPA Network function and performance.

- A comprehensive analysis of how MPAs affect the benefits that non-consumptive users may derive from the ocean.
- A comprehensive analysis of socioeconomic impacts, including commercial and recreational fisheries when making decisions regarding the siting of new MPAs.

See Question 5 of Attachment 1 for significant information gaps.

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

Yes. DMR Recommendation 4 states that CDFW and CFGC should “apply what is learned from the first DMR to support proposed changes to the MPA Network,” and that “current and future proposed changes to Network design, individual MPAs, and current MPA Management Program priorities and policies [should be] consistent with the findings of this Review.”

When the DMR results were released in 2022, they did not indicate that large scale changes, such as the addition of new MPAs, were necessary to improve MPA Network performance. The recommendation at that time was that more time is needed for the benefits of the MPA Network to be fully realized. Results from the DMR did not indicate a deficiency in MPA Network connectivity that would warrant the establishment of a new MPA at Point Sal. Rather, several of the DMR Prioritized Recommendations are aimed at filling critical knowledge gaps in our understanding of the MPA Network functioning as a social-ecological system. Prior to implementing large-scale changes, critical knowledge gaps, including better integration of fisheries and MPA management, need to be filled, along with continued climate change monitoring and human dimensions considerations. Furthermore, the directives in Fish & G. Code, section 2853(c)(5) require a process for the establishment, modification, or abolishment of existing or new MPAs that should involve interested parties and be consistent with the Master Plan objectives that align with Fish & G. Code, section 2853(c)(5). These objectives require CDFW to consider factors such as socioeconomic impacts, results of monitoring and evaluation, and methods for robust public participation in the design of the MPA Network. CFGC’s petition process does not offer the level of robust engagement and in-depth analysis required by the MLPA and Master Plan for siting new MPAs.

With respect to tribal co-management of California’s MPAs, several of the DMR Prioritized Recommendations (CDFW 2022) are directly related to advancing tribal coordination,

including recommendations 1, 2, and 24: (1) Improve state agencies tribal engagement and relationship building efforts; (2) Create a clear pathway to tribal MPA management; and (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network, which may lead to advancements for recommendation (3) Build tribal capacity to participate in MPA management activities.

CDFW has been unable to make substantial progress on other DMR Recommendations due to the time and resources dedicated to the MPA petition process. As a result, CDFW still needs to work with tribes to develop a pathway to tribal MPA management and to improve tribal capacity to engage in MPA management activities and co-stewardship agreements. Tribes and the State already use a variety of approaches to establish such frameworks, including formal co-stewardship agreements, co-management agreements, and memoranda of understanding. Accordingly, CDFW is committed to continuing to work collaboratively with tribes through these and other such partnerships. See 'Tribal Co-Management' in the Evaluation Narrative and Overview for more information.

DMR Recommendation 24 (MPA Network Design) focuses specifically on working with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network. It includes two sub-recommendations:

- (a) Develop a process to incorporate SMCPAs (MMAIA § 36700(6)(d)) into existing MPAs and new locations across the Network, and
- (b) Define metrics for identifying culturally important objects and sites to recommend for potential protection.

One potential pathway for implementation at this location is designation of a State Marine Cultural Preservation Area (SMCPA) by California State Parks, as identified in MMAIA § 36700(6)(d). This could help advance DMR Recommendation 24. However, it represents a current management gap, as no SMCPAs exist in the MPA Network, and their designation would require coordination with California State Parks and action by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

DMR Recommendation 8 related to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, would "Evaluate the accessibility of MPAs to various community groups," This work has not yet been completed, but could help assess how the proposed new MPA might affect communities of concern.

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

Yes. An MPA at Point Sal was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process, but not with the take allowances proposed in the petition (MLPAI 2006).

An MPA at Point Sal was considered during the MLPA Initiative planning process, but it was deliberately not included in the final adopted MPA Network. Package 3, one of three MPA arrays developed internally by the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group CCRSG, and Package AC, developed externally²² by NRDC (co-sponsors of the petition) and Point Blue Conservation Science, both proposed SMRs at Point Sal with footprints similar to the SMCA proposed in this petition. The other two CCRSG array packages did not include an MPA near Point Sal. Each of the groups responsible for development of MPA packages noted difficulties in determining the extent to protect the area's three main headlands (i.e., Point Sal, Purisima Point, and Point Arguello) while minimizing socioeconomic impacts (MLPAI 2006). For example, in their second revision, the proponents of Package 2 included an MPA at Purisima Point (Vandenberg SMR) but not at Point Sal or Point Arguello, stating that they chose to leave "several major headland areas outside of MPA protection to facilitate scientific comparison and to minimize socioeconomic impacts." As part of the rationale for including an MPA at Purisima Point, the group said that the "proposed SMR is designed to leave the area around Point Sal (which is more easily accessible from port and therefore more heavily fished) open to fishing activities."

The developers of Package 3, which was billed as a "hybrid" array that united myriad, sometimes opposing, perspectives, originally included an MPA at Purisima Point. In their second revision, they stated, "In response to the feedback from the SAT, the group . . . exchanged a proposed SMR at Purisima Point for an SMR at Point Sal to address spacing concerns." Following several iterations of refinement and direction from the Blue Ribbon Task Force, a modified proposal, Package 3R, was jointly developed by MLPA Initiative staff, proponents of the original Package 3, and SAT members. This array was ultimately recommended as the preferred alternative, and included an SMR at Purisima Point, but not at Point Sal.

An MPA in this area was considered multiple times throughout the rigorous, science-based, stakeholder-driven MLPA planning process and intentionally not adopted at that time. The socioeconomic considerations that informed this outcome likely remain

²² During the Central Coast region planning process, the SAT and MLPA Initiative staff evaluated externally generated proposals, in addition to arrays proposed by the CCRSG.

relevant (see Impacts to Fisheries and Socioeconomic Impacts above and response to Question 15 for more information on potential consumptive impacts) and new information warranting revisiting this assessment has not been presented.

Monitoring of the MPA Network was an additional consideration. Point Sal was intended to function as an unprotected reference site for Vandenberg SMR, 10 miles south (MLPAI 2006). Although the Point Sal area does not currently serve as a reference site for MPA monitoring of key habitats, other important monitoring efforts do occur here (see Question 15 for more information).

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

No. The petition identifies several factors as new information warranting reconsideration of the proposed MPA, including changing ocean conditions associated with climate change, the lack of government-to-government consultation with tribes during the original MLPA Initiative planning process, continued development and industrialization of coastal resources since the implementation phase, and new scientific literature highlighting the conservation value of the area. While these issues are important, none provides a sufficient basis for reevaluating the proposed change.

Tribal partnerships and engagement since the MLPA Initiative planning process have evolved through mechanisms such as Executive Orders and specific regulatory changes. For example, Executive Order B-10-11 (2011) and the CDFW Tribal Communication and Consultation Policy (2014) helped to bridge the gap in the MLPA. More recently, Executive Order N-15-19 (2019), the 2020 Ancestral Lands Policy, and the California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Stewardship Policy have continued to shape state policy by prioritizing cultural access and preservation and further incorporating sovereign recognition, among many other objectives. An alternative path to fulfill tribal engagement and the non-regulatory request for co-management is to explore opportunities for co-management in the Point Sal area without establishing a new MPA. Additionally, an alternative to designating a new MPA would be for CDFW to work with the California Native American tribes that have cultural ties to the area and California State Parks to explore designating a SMCPA to acknowledge the cultural significance of the area without limiting fishing access to the public and other tribes that have a historical connection to the area, which would better align with Goal 3. This is consistent with DMR Prioritized Recommendation (24) Work with CFGC and partners to better incorporate marine cultural heritage into the design of the MPA Network.

With respect to climate change, the establishment of a single new MPA, particularly one not specifically designed to address climate resilience, is unlikely to meaningfully influence the overall resilience or functionality of the broader MPA Network (see response to Question 9 for MPA design and SAT Science Guidelines). Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the original MLPA Initiative planning process, the ecological principles underlying MPA Network design, such as larval connectivity and habitat replication, support both ecological and climate resilience. Indeed, MPAs in California have been shown to support larger, older, and more abundant marine populations that are more resilient to disturbances (CDFW 2022). Still, the extent to which these ecological benefits translate into improved resistance or adaptation to climate-driven impacts remains uncertain, and the magnitude of any such benefit is likely highly spatiotemporally variable. For example, while there is promising research showing that MPAs, including some within the existing MPA Network, may confer some resilience to climate disturbances (Micheli et al. 2012, Carr et al. 2017, Roberts et al. 2017, Bates et al. 2019, CDFW 2022, Jacquemont et al. 2022, Raimondi and Smith 2022, Ziegler et al. 2023, Benedetti-Cecchi et al. 2024, Kumagai et al. 2024, Olguín-Jacobson et al. 2025, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025), these benefits are not predictably consistent (Coleman et al. 2017, Bruno et al. 2018, Freedman et al. 2020, Kyprioti et al. 2021, Smith et al. 2023, Filbee-Dexter et al. 2024, Ortiz-Villa et al. 2025). Thus, adding an additional MPA in this area is not likely to further promote climate resiliency beyond what the current MPA Network is currently providing (See Companion Document, Attachment 1 for more information on Climate Resiliency and MPAs). More research is needed to determine the factors that contribute to resilience across different species, habitats, and regions and how to best support these benefits. Further exploration of climate change resiliency and the role of MPA design will be guided by the DMR Recommendations focused on MPA Network performance (CDFW 2022) and the recommendations put forth in the “Climate Resilience and California’s Marine Protected Area Network” report (Hofmann et al. 2021).

The threat of increased coastal development and marine industrialization are also mentioned as reasons to buffer the MPA Network. However, the existence of an MPA will not necessarily impede future coastal or marine development in this area.

Lastly, the conservation value of the area is not in question; this area was discussed at length during the Central Coast region planning process (2004 – 2007), primarily due to its conservation value. What is not apparent is the benefit to the MPA Network of adding the proposed partial take MPA beyond what is afforded by the existing protections. Research highlighted in the petition indicates

this area may be an important larval retention zone. However, the area will continue functioning as an important larval retention zone regardless of whether it is within an MPA or not. The results from the DMR do not indicate a deficiency in MPA Network connectivity that would warrant the establishment of a new MPA. Moreover, the proposed regulations would prevent this MPA from acting as a backbone MPA; therefore, it is not expected to contribute to ecological objectives of the MPA Network.

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

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

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

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

The proposed new MPA would be 9.27 sq. mi. with a Moderate-low LOP, when using the LOP assignments developed by the South Coast Region SAT²³ (Table 2). Although the proposed MPA exceeds the minimum size threshold of 9 sq. mi., it does not meet the LOP criterion of Moderate-high or above required by the SAT Science Guidelines, so the MPA as proposed would not serve as a backbone MPA. Therefore, implementation of the proposed change would not improve the design of the MPA Network or enhance alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines. Additional data are needed to determine if an

²³ The proposed Point Sal SMCA is located in the Central Coast Study Region. However, the LOP assigned to this form of take by the SAT in the South Coast Study Region is used here, because the SAT in the Central Coast Study Region did not consider allowances for take of unspecified finfish by hook-and-line from shore and because Point Sal is located at the southern end of the Central Coast Study Region near the South Coast Study Region.

MPA at this location with a Moderate-high LOP would produce meaningful ecological benefits beyond what is already achieved by the existing science-based design.

Information included in the petition highlights the ecological significance and diverse habitats in this area and suggests that the proposed MPA would add replicates of key habitats to the MPA Network. However, contribution to habitat replication requires both backbone status and sufficient area of a specific habitat to capture 90% of the biodiversity associated with that habitat, as determined from biological surveys. Although the proposed MPA would contain the minimum amounts required of rocky intertidal, beach, and nearshore soft bottom habitat to contribute to representation of these habitats, it would not contribute to replication of these habitats in the MPA Network because of the Moderate-low LOP. If the MPA was proposed as an SMR or a highly protected SMCA (at least a Moderate-high LOP), it would meet the LOP criteria to be a backbone MPA and would contribute to replication of rocky intertidal, beach, and nearshore soft substrate. However, these three habitats are well represented and spaced in the existing MPA Network. The closest backbone MPAs containing these habitats are Vandenberg SMR 10.4 miles south and the Point Buchon SMR/SMCA cluster 19.4 miles north of the proposed Point Sal SMCA. Spaced 32.5 miles apart, these backbone MPAs are well within the recommended maximum spacing interval of 31-62 miles. The petitioners also indicate that the proposed MPA would improve replication of hard and soft bottom habitats in the 0-30 and 30-100 m depth zones. Even if the proposed MPA achieved backbone status, the MPA as proposed would need to be expanded by approximately 7 sq. mi. to contain the minimum quantity of nearshore hard bottom habitat or of hard or soft bottom habitat in the 30-100 m depth zone required to contribute to replication of these habitats (Table 2). See Question 9 of Attachment 1 for the SAT Science Guidelines and additional context.

Ultimately, alignment with SAT Science Guidelines is evaluated at the MPA Network scale, where metrics like habitat replication and spacing are assessed collectively across all MPAs rather than individually. Consistent with this approach, individual petitions should not be evaluated in isolation, as changes to a single MPA may affect overall MPA Network performance. The petitions 2023-18MPA and 2022-002 have potential to affect the design of Vandenberg SMR, which introduces uncertainty in the structure of the MPA Network, as there are implications relevant to evaluating conformance of the proposed Point Sal SMCA with the SAT Science Guidelines. However, it does not alter the current assessment that the proposed Point Sal SMCA does not clearly enhance alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines within the existing MPA Network.

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

No. The proposed new SMCA as designed would not align with the following Feasibility Guidelines: boundaries are not all described using readily determined lines of latitude and longitude and regional objectives and site-specific rationales should reflect the design of the MPA. Landmarks described in the petition align with the proposed boundaries, but it is unclear whether these landmarks (e.g., the end of VSFB Road) are easily recognizable from both shore and by boat. MLPA Goals and site-specific objectives for the proposed MPA are described, though many are not aligned with the proposed take regulations (e.g., ecological goals should not be attributed to an MPA with an LOP below Moderate-high). See Question 10a of Attachment 1 for CDFW Feasibility Guidelines.

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

CDFW has presented alternatives and recommends CFGC consider whether there is rationale for moving forward with an alternative, given the considerations and data gaps presented in the narrative and Table 1. There are alternatives that would meet the intent but better align with SAT Science Guidelines and CDFW Feasibility Guidelines. One alternative to designating a new MPA would be for CFGC to request CDFW to work with NCTC and other California Native American tribes that have cultural ties to the area, and California State Parks to explore designating a SMCPA to acknowledge the cultural significance of the area. Another alternative if CFGC wishes to expand the MPA Network by establishing a new place-based MPA, is to establish an SMR or more highly protected SMCA, which would be more likely to meet the ecological goals stated in the petition. The boundaries could be modified to use readily determined lines of latitude and longitude and easily recognizable permanent landmarks to better align with the Feasibility Guidelines.

If disturbance to bird and pinniped populations is a primary concern, a Special Closure²⁴ designation restricting access to the waters in the immediate vicinity of Lion Rock would be a more appropriate designation than an MPA. MPA designation affects take of living, geological, or cultural resources. Although this designation is the appropriate designation to offer additional protections for birds

²⁴ An area designated by CFGC that prohibits access or restricts boating activities in waters adjacent to seabird rookeries or marine mammal haul-out sites; used by CFGC for relatively small, discrete marine areas to achieve the goals of the MLPA (CDFW 2016).

and/or pinnipeds, CDFW does not have site-specific data documenting that other state and federal protections are not adequate to protect birds and pinnipeds in this area. Given that marine mammals are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and take of seabirds is generally not permitted, MPA designation is unlikely to provide additional protections for these species.

The Feasibility Guidelines state, a “Special Closures should only be proposed if other state and federal regulations are inadequate to provide protections to marine species. Proposed Special Closures should include information on the rationale behind the proposal, species involved, and specific information on why other existing state and federal protections (including the establishment of an MPA) are not adequate.” CFGC has established 14 Special Closures for relatively small, discrete marine areas to achieve the goals of the MLPA (CDFW 2016).

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

No. The proposed new MPA would result in enforcement challenges because the boundaries are not aligned with readily determinable lines of latitude and longitude. It is unclear whether the proposed boundaries align with permanent landmarks that are easily recognizable for boat-based and shore-based users.

The proposed change would introduce a new section of MPA regulations which would require enforcement. Partial-take MPAs such as the one proposed in this petition are generally more difficult to enforce than No-take MPAs because of:

- Difficulty in discerning if an activity is allowed when surveilling the MPA from afar,
- Increased potential for non-compliance by members of the public who observe activity taking place in an MPA but are unfamiliar with the specific regulations, and
- Increased potential for the illegal take of other species.

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

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

No. The proposed new Point Sal SMCA would not simplify existing language or enhance public understanding. It would add a new section of regulations and some of the

proposed language would be duplicative with other existing regulations or is unnecessary.

The request to add the proposed language regarding VSFB is not needed in Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632 because: (1) Cal. Code Regs. tit. 14, section 632, subd. (a) already includes provisions to accommodate “uses of the waters identified as marine protected areas, special closures, or the lands or waters adjacent to these designated areas by the Department of Defense, its allies or agents,” including VSFB; (2) CDFW and VSFB have existing authorities to periodically restrict access to areas, so the language would be redundant; and (3) The directive for CDFW and VSFB to develop an MOU is non-regulatory and CDFW could work with VSFB to amend the existing MOU with VSFB that covers Vandenberg SMR if another MPA is established adjacent to the base.

Further, CDFW and VSFB have a valid MOU for Vandenberg SMR for the purpose of voluntary cooperation in clarifying the goals and objectives in the management and administration for Vandenberg SMR; protecting coastal and marine resources; and preserving essential military training, operational capabilities, and other mission critical activities. CDFW could work with VSFB to amend the existing MOU if another MPA is established adjacent to the base.

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

Yes. The proposed change would prohibit commercial and recreational boat-based fishing, which could provide localized protection to marine resources, particularly to fish and invertebrates in the offshore portion of the proposed SMCA. The proposed change would also prohibit other shore-based, recreational take (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crab and mussels). However, recreational shore-based hook-and-line fishing would still be permitted, resulting in a Moderate-low LOP under the SAT framework (see response to Question 9). Although ecological objectives including protection of productive key habitats and enhancement of regional connectivity are identified in the petition, the MPA as proposed is not expected to fully achieve these objectives because the LOP is lower than that associated with backbone MPAs under the SAT Science Guidelines.

During the MLPA Initiative planning process, the SAT based LOP assignments on the assumption of maximum plausible intensity for any given proposed activity within MPAs. Thus, activities assigned a Moderate-low LOP were deemed likely by the SAT to alter species abundance relative to an SMR, as well as to significantly alter community structure by changing the abundance of a species that plays an important ecological role. In determining those species likely to benefit from an SMR, the SAT considered species home range sizes and movement patterns, including site fidelity to those home

ranges. Many of the species that may be caught using hook-and-line from shore have small home ranges, exhibit vulnerable life history traits (e.g., late to mature, slow-growing, bear live young), or form spawning aggregations in the surf zone. These characteristics make them particularly vulnerable to the direct impacts of fishing from shore. As such, many surf zone fishes, including surf perches (embiotocids), rockfishes (*Sebastes* spp.), and sharks, skates, and rays (elasmobranchs), were identified as species likely to benefit from MPA protection. These species, along with other frequently targeted surf zone fishes, play important roles in the food web dynamics of nearshore communities. Harvest of these species not only directly alters the abundance of these species, but also likely affects community structure, both in the surf zone and in adjacent habitats and depth zones. As a result, the impacts of fishing from shore may extend far from the zone of actual fishing. With respect to shore fishing, the SAT Guidelines state, "Many of the species removed through shore fishing play important roles in the nearshore community. For example, surfperches and croakers are important invertebrate predators, sea chubs (opaleye and halfmoon) are important omnivorous grazers, silversides are micro-omnivores and all groups provide important prey for a variety of larger fishes, marine birds and mammals. By altering the abundance of multiple species, shore fishing is likely to have impacts on community structure within an MPA both within the range of the actual fishing gear as well as in adjacent depth zones and habitats." In addition to direct impacts, the SAT also considered indirect impacts, including bycatch, incidental take, and habitat/gear interactions.

Point Sal State Beach is currently only accessible via the 12-mile round trip Point Sal Trail because the road has been closed since 2008, making access somewhat challenging for many. However, the petition states, "In addition to the designation of a new Point Sal SMCA, we urge the state to redouble its efforts to provide access to Point Sal State Beach by reopening Point Sal Road." This could increase visitation and use within the area and may also produce unintended adverse impacts to sensitive dune habitats, such as erosion and habitat disturbance (see response to Question 4 for more details).

Given LOP assignments are based on types of allowed activities rather than current or expected intensity of those uses, the proposed new SMCA would have a Moderate-low LOP to ensure consistency with the SAT Science Guidelines and maintain their precautionary approach. Thus, despite the area's current remoteness and access challenges, it would be inconsistent to presume the proposed SMCA would function with a higher LOP or offer the same protection as an SMR. To achieve the petitioner's stated ecological and protection goals, the proposed MPA would need to be established as an SMR with a Very High LOP or as a highly protected SMCA (at least Moderate-high LOP). Otherwise, the MPA as proposed would not qualify as a backbone MPA and thus would not improve alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines or contribute toward MLPA Goals 1 and 2. Inconsistent application of the precautionary approach used to develop the SAT

Science Guidelines risks undermining the scientific foundation of the statewide MPA Network.

Regardless of LOP, additional information is needed to evaluate the conservation benefit of the proposed MPA. For example, while the petitioner notes the presence of kelp beds as a habitat that would benefit from protection at this site, kelp has never been detected within the proposed boundaries in Landsat imagery and was detected only once over a 13-year period of CDFW aerial surveys. The area lies within a biogeographical transition zone and functions as a larval retention zone due to the physiography of the headlands (Wing et al. 1995, Graham and Largier 1997, Mace and Morgan 2006). Although studies cited by the petitioner indicate that eddies formed in the lee of headlands can accumulate larvae, additional analyses would be necessary to evaluate the extent to which the proposed MPA would meaningfully contribute to larval connectivity or recruitment within the broader MPA Network (Mace and Morgan 2006, Robinette et al. 2019). Moreover, as noted in one of the studies cited by the petitioner, such accumulation zones may not always coincide with habitat suitable for meeting MPA science or design objectives (Mace and Morgan 2006). These zones are typically nearshore sandy deposition areas, which, while regionally less common, are well represented in the existing MPA Network. Further analysis would be required to determine the potential marginal value of protecting more of this habitat type within the existing MPA Network.

The petition also mentions the importance of minimizing human disturbance to seabirds and pinnipeds in the area, particularly around Lion Rock. Lion Rock is a significant pinniped haul out and seabird roosting and breeding area (Mason et al. 2007, Capitolo et al. 2011, Robinette and Acosta 2011, Capitolo et al. 2012, Robinette et al. 2012, Robinette et al. 2013, Santora and Sydeman 2015, CDFW OSPR 2018, NMFS 2024, USSF 2025). However, an SMCA designation would still permit entry into the area and may not achieve the effect envisioned by the petitioners; instead, designation of a Special Closure around the rock could be considered as a targeted management measure to specifically address human disturbance and offer more protection.

CDFW considered this proposed change in context of the other proposed actions in the 14 other 2023 Bin 2 petitions. While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR have the most critical bearing on Point Sal because they are the only proposals in proximity to Point Sal that pose a net reduction in regional conservation. The petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. In contrast, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces no new backbone MPA; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries. This introduces uncertainty in the structure of the MPA Network and is

relevant to the assessment of whether the proposed new MPA at Point Sal will maintain or enhance protection of marine resources. See response to Question 5 regarding significant information gaps.

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

See Question 14 of Attachment 1.

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

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

One of the goals of the proposed MPA is to, “advance Tribal co-stewardship and MPA management through a collaborative co-stewardship approach with the Northern Chumash Tribal Council,” with supporting cultural access and activities within the MPA one of the specific desired outcomes of co-stewardship. Despite this, the Point Sal SMCA, as proposed, would limit NCTC’s and other tribes’ ability to continue subsistence practices and cultural harvest of shore-based resources (except hook-and-line fishing for finfish), including shore-based recreational take (e.g., seaweed and invertebrates such as crab and mussels) and boat fishing.

The proposed Point Sal SMCA has the potential to impact both commercial and recreational consumptive uses. Consumptive users that would be impacted include the commercial nearshore groundfish²⁵ fishery and recreational anglers who travel to the area by boat, such as by CPFV²⁶ or private/rental boats, from Morro Bay area ports.

The proposed Point Sal SMCA overlaps with Commercial Fishing Blocks 631 and 632. From 2013–2025, these two blocks have contributed roughly \$3.4 million in commercial

²⁵ For a list of all nearshore groundfish, see the California Nearshore Fishery Management Plan (CDFW 2002). Representative nearshore groundfish from the surrounding area of the proposed new MPA include cabezon, *Scorpaenichthys marmoratus*; California scorpionfish, *Scorpaena guttata*; California sheephead, *Bodianus pulcher*; black rockfish, *Sebastes melanops*; black-and-yellow rockfish, *S. chrysomelas*; blue rockfish, *S. mystinus*; brown rockfish, *S. auriculatus*, calico rockfish, *S. dalli*; China rockfish, *S. nebulosus*; copper rockfish, *S. caurinus*; gopher rockfish, *S. carnatus*; grass rockfish, *S. rastrelliger*; kelp rockfish, *S. atrovirens*; olive rockfish, *S. serranoides*; quillback rockfish, *S. maliger*; treefish, *S. serriceps*; kelp greenling, *Hexagrammos decagrammus*; rock greenling, *H. lagocephalus*; and monkeyface prickleback, *Cebidichthys violaceus*.

²⁶The CPFV fleet takes paying customers to recreationally fish at offshore coastal locations.

groundfish fishery landings (Figure 1), accounting for approximately 22% of all value of commercial nearshore groundfish landed by all allowed gear types at the nearby ports of Morro Bay and Port San Luis combined. Implementing the proposed MPA would result in loss of those fishing grounds within the MPA.

While the area is not as readily accessible to shore-based fishing due to a long hike to the site, CPFVs and private boaters operating out of Morro Bay area ports (Port San Luis, Morro Bay Harbor, and San Simeon) frequent the area, especially during periods of rough weather when other fishing options are not available. Since the MPA Network was fully implemented, there were a total of 702 CPFV trips to fishing blocks 631 and 632. This tracking spans from 2013 through the most recent 2025 data. During this period, there was an average of 12.4 (± 10.7 SD) CPFV trips per year to block 631, and an average of 49.2 (± 21 SD) CPFV trips per year to block 632 (Figure 2). These blocks account for 12.8% of all CPFV trips out of Morro Bay ports during that time frame. Spatial trends in average catch per angler between 2016 and 2024 from CRFS²⁷ indicate the area is popular with private and rental boat anglers (Figure 3).

Other shore-based consumptive uses, including the recreational take of resources such as seaweed, crab, and mussels may also be affected.

More specific CPFV location information in the Point Sal area was obtained from the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo fisheries observer program ([Cal Poly Observer Program](#), abbreviated here as CPOP). This program sends fisheries observers aboard CPFV recreational fishing trips out of Morro Bay and Port San Luis, who collect length and species data for all fish caught by a subset of anglers during each fishing “drop” (the period in which lines were in the water), as well as metadata for each drop such as GPS coordinates (Stephens et al. 2006, Dodgen et al. 2025). CPOP observers accompanied 145 CPFV trips out of Port San Luis between 2004 and 2018 (data from Dodgen et al. 2025). Of these trips, 22, or approximately 15%, fished within the boundaries of the proposed Point Sal MPA (Figure 4, data from Dodgen et al. 2025). All observed CPFV trips located within blocks 631 and 632 went to the area that would be occupied by the proposed MPA. In the 2004–2018 period, there were a total of 5,878 CPFV trips out of Port San Luis, meaning that approximately 2.5% of them were observed. The fact that a considerable proportion, 15%, of the small percentage of trips observed went to this location suggests that it is visited by this fleet frequently. Prohibiting boat-based fishing

²⁷ CRFS conducts angler-intercept surveys of catch, effort, and location across multiple fishing modes. For the private/rental boat fishing mode, angler-intercept surveys are conducted at launch ramps, boat hoists, and boat rental locations where the public (from a subset of fishing trips) is intercepted to collect information on fish caught and released, biological data on kept catch, and approximate fishing location(s). Fishing locations are at the level of micro fishing blocks (approximately 1 x 1 square miles). Thus, spatial CRFS catch-per-angler data reflects the distribution of fish caught and kept per angler on this surveyed subset of trips.

access in this area is therefore expected to have adverse economic impacts on the CPFV fleet. As noted above in response to Question 7, this area was considered for inclusion in the MPA Network during the planning process but was ultimately excluded due to its high importance to commercial and recreational fisheries. Those same considerations remain relevant and suggest that the proposed change would have substantial effects on existing consumptive uses of the area.

The proposed change would also affect federal stock assessment research. Assessments using CPOP data include the 2015 Bocaccio assessment (He et al. 2015), the 2015 China Rockfish assessment (Dick et al. 2016), the 2017 Bocaccio assessment (He and Field 2018), and the 2019 combined Gopher and Black-and-Yellow Rockfish assessment (Monk and He 2019). Data collected by CPOP is used in the model in two ways, 1) as an index of abundance with associated size structure data, and 2) the fish kept or discarded dead by anglers on these trips is incorporated into the overall estimate of the total weight of all recreational fish removed. Implementing the proposed Point Sal SMCA would preclude open public CPFV fishing trips in the area. This restriction limits localized CPOP data collection and creates a monitoring "blind spot" for stock assessment scientists tracking groundfish populations. For example:

- Continuing CPOP data collection would require specifically chartered research trips rather than leveraging existing public fishing trips.
- The Scientific Collecting Permit for the research charters would strictly limit the number of fish that could be legally kept.
- Artificially limiting the number of retained fish introduces sampling bias and makes it difficult to distinguish an actual population decline from a survey that simply missed the fish's geographic concentration.
- Restricting catch data could distort overall length and age composition models, particularly if this specific area serves as a strong population recruitment location.
- These combined data gaps ultimately introduce a much higher measure of uncertainty into final stock assessment estimates.

Given the value of these data for federal stock assessments and that all CPOP-observed trips that went to this area fished within the proposed SMCA's boundaries (data from Dodgen et al. 2025), the new MPA is likely to reduce the availability of fishery-dependent data from this area, which has potential to impact the quality of these assessments and consequently, our understanding of the status and health of economically valuable rockfish populations.

The area also provides many opportunities for human connection with the ocean through non-consumptive activities such as swimming, surfing, beach combing, and

wildlife viewing. Understanding how people interact with and derive benefits from the ocean and how these benefits may be affected by MPAs is challenging (Hall-Arber et. al. 2021, CDFW 2022, Travis et al. 2026). Social science research within the MPA Monitoring Program is a rapidly expanding field of MPA research, as well as a priority DMR Recommendation to invest in improving understanding of the human dimensions of MPAs and develop a human dimensions working group and research agenda (DMR Recommendation 12).

The data described here represents a single analysis of potential impacts on fisheries in the area. The full extent of socioeconomic impacts in this area, including on fisheries, is unknown (see Question 5 in Attachment 1).

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

See Question 16 of Attachment 1.

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

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

The proposed change would reduce fishing access, particularly for fishery participants associated with the coastal fishing communities of Avila (Port San Luis) and Morro Bay. While the extent of the impact is unclear, decreased access may affect the viability of the homeported fishing operations and broader fishing community. The action does retain shore-based hook and line fishing.

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

Yes. There is a potential interaction with petition 2023-18 MPA and 2022-002. While some adjacent proposals preserve regional protections, the petitions for the Vandenberg SMR have the most critical bearing on Point Sal because they are the only proposals in proximity to Point Sal that pose a net reduction in regional conservation. The petitions for Vandenberg SMR propose adding an allowance for shore-based hook-and-line fishing, which would lower its LOP such that it would lose its status as a backbone MPA. In contrast, to the north, the proposal for Point Buchon SMR preserves its backbone status and the new Chitqawi SMCA introduces no new backbone MPA; to the south, the proposal for Point Conception SMR expands its boundaries (see responses to Questions 5, 9, and 13).

V. SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES, DATA AND INFORMATION, AND CITATIONS

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 2. MPA attributes (area, LOP, depth range, and habitat extent) of Point Sal SMCA as proposed in petition 2023-28MPA_AM2. Habitat extent may be reported in linear miles or square miles, depending on data availability and Science Advisory Team guidance. A dash (—) indicates that the proposed MPA does not contain the habitat type. An MPA contributes to habitat replication only if it first meets the minimum size (>9 sq. mi.) and LOP (Very High, High, or Moderate-high) criteria (i.e., first two rows must be bold), according to SAT Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process. As proposed, the Point Sal SMCA has an LOP of Moderate-low and does not meet the threshold for LOP^a.

	Proposed
MPA Area (sq mi)	9.27
Level of Protection	Moderate-low
Min Depth (m)	0
Max Depth (m)	56.9
Eelgrass (sq mi)	—
Kelp (mi)	—
Beach (mi) ^a	2.56
Rocky Intertidal (mi) ^a	2.55
Estuaries (sq mi)	—
Hard Substrate	
0-30 m (mi)	0.86
30-100 m (sq mi)	0.16
100-200 m (sq mi)	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—
Soft Substrate	
0-30 m (mi) ^a	2.64
30-100 m (sq mi)	4.23
100-200 m (sq mi)	—
>200 m (sq mi)	—

^a If the proposed Point Sal MPA were to meet the SAT Science Guidelines for LOP of at least Moderate-high, the proposed MPA contains sufficient habitat to qualify as a habitat replicate for beach, rocky intertidal, and soft substrate (0-30 m), according to SAT Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process.

Nearshore Groundfish Commercial Fishing Value 2013-2025

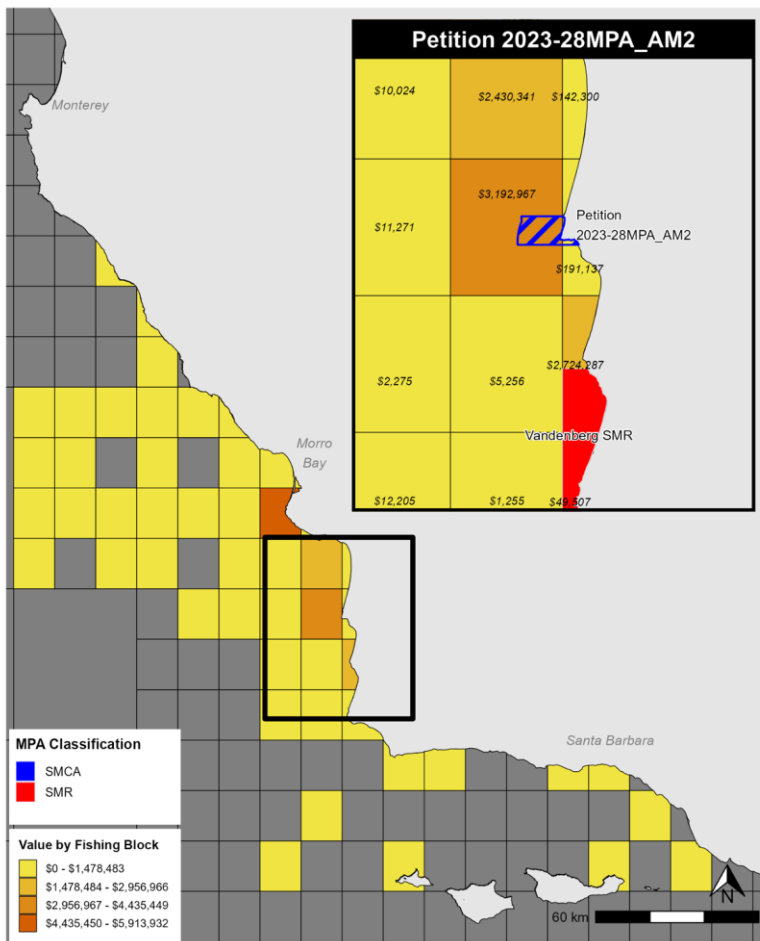


Figure 1. Total value (in \$US) of commercially caught nearshore groundfish (cabezon, *Scorpaenichthys marmoratus*; California scorpionfish, *Scorpaena guttata*; California sheephead, *Bodianus pulcher*; black rockfish, *Sebastes melanops*; black-and-yellow rockfish, *S. chrysomelas*; blue rockfish, *S. mystinus*; brown rockfish, *S. auriculatus*; China rockfish, *S. nebulosus*; copper rockfish, *S. caurinus*; gopher rockfish, *S. carnatus*; grass rockfish, *S. rastrelliger*; kelp rockfish, *S. atrovirens*; olive rockfish, *S. serranoides*; quillback rockfish, *S. maliger*; treefish, *S. serriceps*; kelp greenling, *Hexagrammos decagrammus*; rock greenling, *H. lagocephalus*; and monkeyface prickleback, *Cebidichthys violaceus*)* via a variety of gear types from 2013 to 2025. The proposed new Point Sal SMCA is shown on the inset as blue hatching and the existing Vandenberg SMR is shown in red. The proposed MPA lies across Commercial Fishing Blocks 631 and 632. Each block is ten minutes of longitude by ten minutes of latitude (roughly ten miles square). *Note that no calico rockfish were landed during this period for the Point Sal area.

Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel 2013-2025

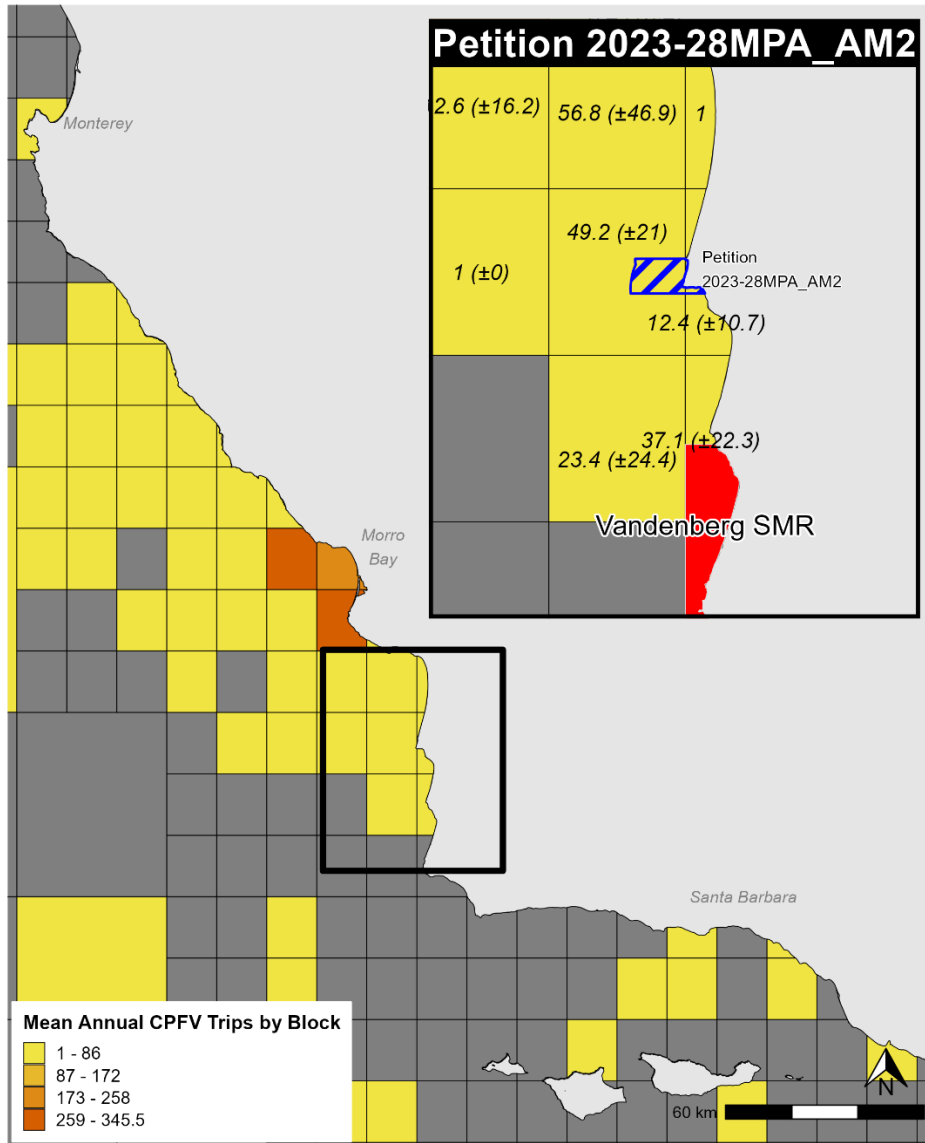


Figure 2. Mean annual ($\pm$ SD) Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) trips by Commercial Fishing Block (fishing block) for the area surrounding the proposed Point Sal MPA, between 2013 and 2025. The CPFV fleet brings paying passengers to recreationally fish at offshore coastal locations. The proposed new Point Sal SMCA is shown on the inset as blue hatching and the existing Vandenberg SMR shown in red. The proposed MPA overlaps with fishing blocks 631 and 632. Each fishing block is ten minutes of longitude by ten minutes of latitude (roughly ten miles square). CPFV trips represented here do not include multi-day fishing trips.

CDFW EVALUATION 2023-28MPA_AM2 Suatoni

Average Catch Per Angler 2016-2024

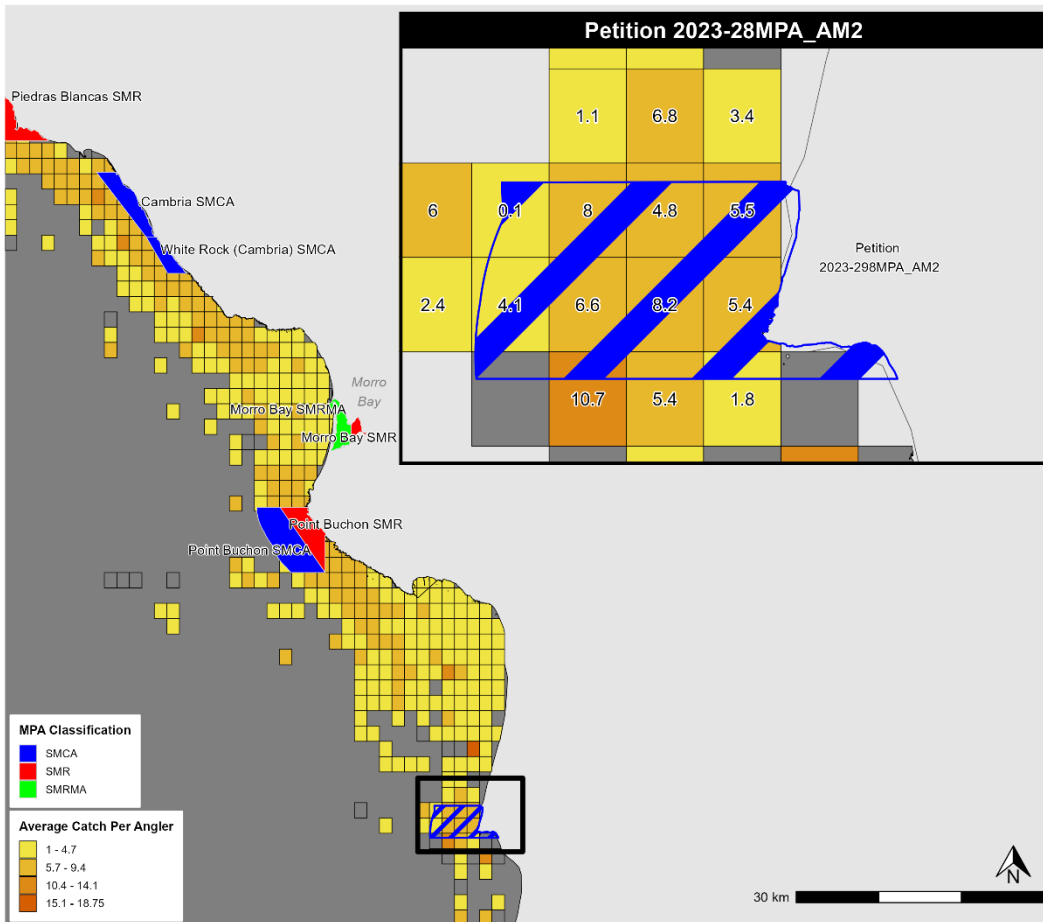


Figure 3. Average catch per angler (includes fish kept and released) for recreational anglers on private or rental boats from 2016 to 2024 by California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) microblock (1 minute of longitude x 1 minute of latitude, or roughly 1 mile square). The proposed new Point Sal SMCA is shown in blue hatching. CRFS conducts angler-intercept surveys of catch, effort, and location across multiple fishing modes. For the private/rental boat fishing mode, angler-intercept surveys are conducted at launch ramps, boat hoists, and boat rental locations where the public (from a subset of fishing trips) are intercepted to collect information on fish caught and released, biological data on kept catch, and approximate fishing location(s). Thus, spatial CRFS catch per angler data reflects the distribution of fish caught and kept per angler on this surveyed subset of trips.

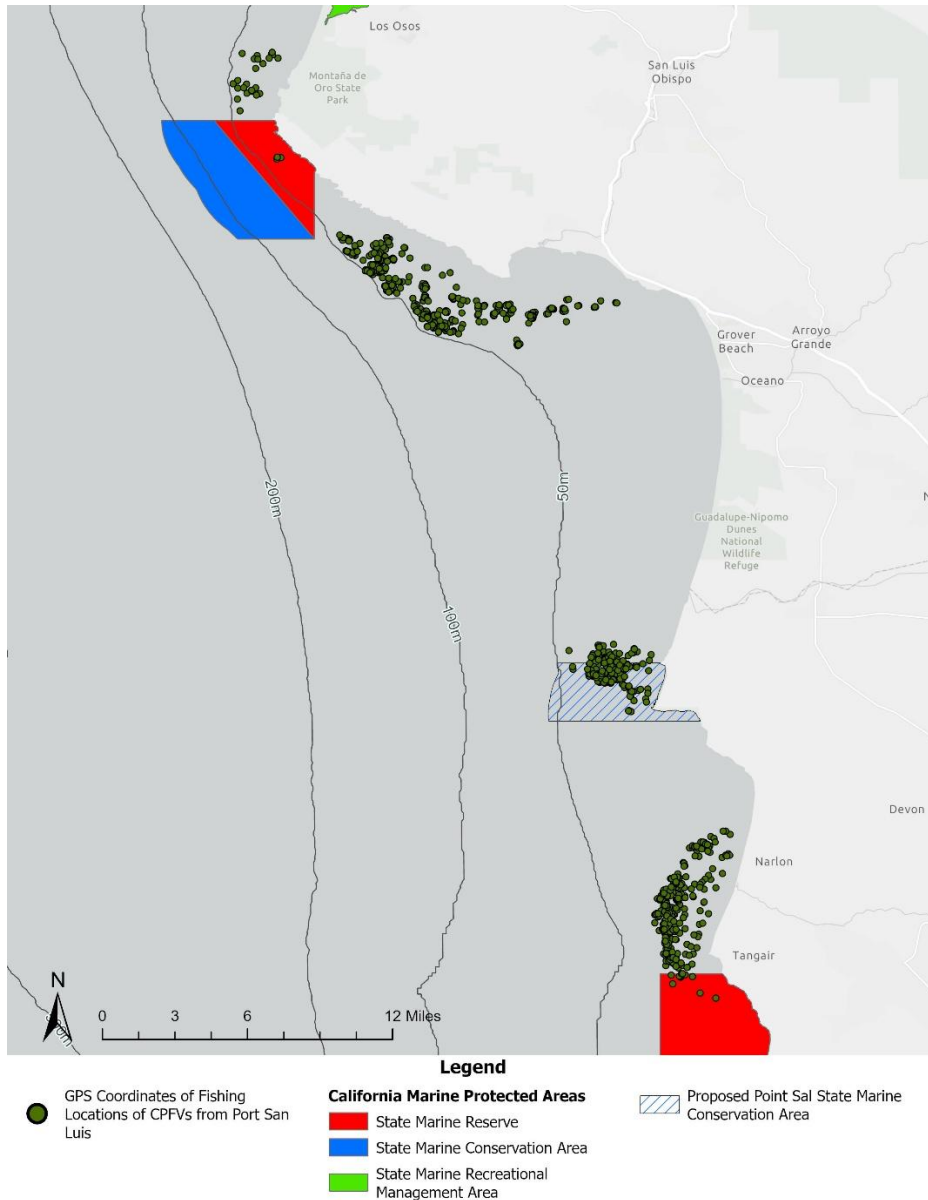


Figure 4. GPS points from California Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) trips out of Port San Luis taken by California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo fisheries observer program observers between 2004 and 2018 (data from Dodgen et al. 2025). The CPFV fleet brings paying passengers to recreationally fish at offshore coastal locations. GPS points are taken multiple times per trip, so one point does not represent one trip, it represents locations where fishing occurred throughout any given trip. Note that some points overlap with State Marine Reserves (SMRs), which do not allow take; this is because the dataset spans the period before, during, and after implementation of the MPA Network and those areas were not SMRs when the data was collected before implementation. Existing MPAs are shown in solid colors, and the proposed Point Sal SMCA is shown as blue hatching.

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