

Attachment 1

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

COMPANION DOCUMENT



July 2026

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

The Companion Document was originally released March 20, 2026 along with CDFW's evaluations and recommendations for the ten Non-tribally-led Petitions. This July 2026 version of the Companion Document includes the following additions: a detailed timeline of the 2023 MPA Petition milestones, updates related to tribal outreach and engagement, a new section on Climate Resilience and MPAs, and additional supplemental information for Question 5 (information gaps) and Question 9 (MPA Network design and Levels of Protection (LOP)) of the evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

At its February 14–15, 2024, meeting, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGC) referred 20 Marine Protected Area (MPA) petitions to CDFW for review, evaluation, and recommendation. These petitions were sorted into Bin 1 and Bin 2 Petitions. The Marine Resources Committee (MRC) considered CDFW's recommendations on 5 Bin 1 Petitions at the November 6–7, 2024 MRC meeting and CFGC adopted the MRC's recommendations at the December 11–12, 2024 CFGC meeting. See Table 1 for a comprehensive overview of process milestones for the 2023 MPA Petitions.

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

The Framework includes the following sections:

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

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

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

The DMR indicated the MPA Network is meeting expectations and functioning effectively towards achieving the Goals of the MLPA. Therefore, significant regulatory changes to the MPA Network should meet a high threshold of demonstrated conservation value and need, as well as clear, science-supported benefit.

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

- 2014 – Clarified and corrected provisions, including general provisions, definitions, take, and boundaries
- 2015 – Clarified and corrected provisions, including general provisions, definitions, take, and boundaries. This includes refining and correcting boundary coordinates for 106 MPAs
- 2016 – Added provisions for tribal take in north coast MPAs
- 2018 – Repealed a special closure due to conflict with private property
- 2018 – Added provisions for tribal take in south coast MPAs and amended boundaries to better align with historical subsistence and cultural use
- 2022 – Cleaned up State Marine Recreational Management Area language
- 2023 – Provided a mechanism for operation and maintenance of pre-existing artificial structures in MPAs

The legislative amendments include Senate Bill 96 (2013), Assembly Bill 298 (2015), Assembly Bill 2369 (2018), and Assembly Bill 63 (2021). See [Appendix G of the Decadal Management Review](#) for more information about regulatory packages and legislative amendments that apply to MPA Network management implemented since 2012. All amendments were deliberately and carefully constructed, consistent with directives in the Fish and Game Code (§§2853 and 2855), MLPA, and the Master Plan for MPAs, to preserve the integrity of the MPA Network.

CDFW remains committed to adaptive management through regulatory and non-regulatory pathways and will continue to work with tribes and partners to advance the Recommendations of the DMR through a science-based, inclusive statewide process consistent with the requirements of the MLPA and Master Plan for MPAs.

Table 1. Summary of 2023 MPA Petition Process Milestones.

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

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Date	Milestone
<i>Aug 2024</i>	CFGF approves binning petitions, requests CDFW evaluate the five Bin 1 Petitions and develop a proposed framework to evaluate 15 Bin 2 Petitions
<i>Nov 2024</i>	CDFW releases recommendations for five Bin 1 Petitions
<i>Dec 2024</i>	CFGF makes decisions on Bin 1 Petitions and establishes March 14, 2025 deadline for amendments to Bin 2 Petitions
<i>Mar 14, 2025</i>	Deadline for amendments to Bin 2 Petitions
<i>Apr 2025</i>	CFGF refers amended Bin 2 Petitions to CDFW for evaluation
<i>Apr-May 2025</i>	CDFW develops Draft Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework with Ocean Protection Council and CFGF staff
<i>May 2025</i>	Update and discussion at CFGF Tribal Committee (TC) meeting on Bin 2 MPA Petitions and proposed approach for evaluations
<i>Aug 2025</i>	Update and discussion on 2023 MPA Petitions and Draft Evaluation Framework at CFGF TC and CFGF. Four Tribally-led petitions identified and CFGF approves framework for evaluating Bin 2 MPA Petitions
<i>Dec 2025</i>	Update and discussion at CFGF TC on Bin 2 MPA Petitions; identifies one more Tribally-led petition; directs CDFW to return to April 2026 CFGF TC to discuss MPA Petitions prior to releasing evaluations for the Tribally-led petitions
<i>Mar 20, 2026</i>	CDFW releases evaluations and recommendations for the 64 proposed actions in the ten non-Tribally-led Bin 2 MPA Petitions and the Companion Document
<i>Apr 2026</i>	Update and discussion at CFGF TC on five Tribally-led petitions. CFGF accepts amendments to four of the Tribally-led petitions and refers them to CDFW for evaluation
<i>Apr-May 2026</i>	Regional CFGF meetings discussing Bin 2 MPA Petitions • April 21, 2026 in San Mateo, Del Norte through Monterey counties petitions • May 5-6, 2026 in Goleta, alongshore San Luis Obispo through Santa Barbara counties petitions (day 1) and Northern Channel Islands (day 2) • May 19, 2026 in San Clemente, Los Angeles through San Diego counties petitions, including Santa Catalina Island
<i>July 2026</i>	CDFW releases evaluations and recommendations for the 9 proposed actions in the five Tribally-led Bin 2 MPA Petitions and the revised Companion Document

SUPPLEMENTAL EVALUATION INFORMATION

CDFW compiled supplemental information and additional context for the Tribally-led petitions, the topic of climate resilience and MPAs, and the responses to Evaluation Questions 1, 2a, 5, 9, 10a, and 14, and Section V. Supplemental Analyses, Data and Information, and Citations. CFGC staff conducted the analysis and prepared the responses for Questions 16 and 17 and provided additional context for their evaluations below. The information provided here was common across the evaluations and is included here to prevent having to repeat it in each evaluation.

TRIBALLY-LED PETITIONS

This Companion Document includes a summary of the process for identifying Tribally-led petitions, CDFW's outreach to all California Native American tribes throughout the petitions process, and a summary of outreach and engagement with Tribally-led petitioners (Attachment A below). As directed by CFGC, CDFW evaluated the Tribally-led petitions with the CDFW 2023 MPA Bin 2 Petition Evaluation Framework. Tribally-led petitions, per CFGC direction, were discussed at the April 14, 2026, CFGC Tribal Committee meeting. *Note: California Native American tribe is the preferred term to use per the Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs when generally mentioning tribes of California, both federally and non-federally recognized.*

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

- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Designate a New Chitqawi SMCA Near Morro Bay with a Tribal Take Exemption for Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (2023-19MPA_AM1)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Establish Co-Management at Point Buchon SMCA, Change the Name, and Add a Tribal Exemption for Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians at Point Buchon SMCA, and Change the Boundary at Point Buchon SMR (2023-20MPA_AM1)
- Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation: Remove Recreational Take of True Smelt and Change the Boundary at Pyramid Point SMCA (2023-21MPA_AM1)
- Northern Chumash Tribal Council: Designate a New SMCA Near Point Sal with an Allowance for Recreational Take of Finfish by Hook-and-Line from Shore (2023-28MPA_AM2)
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians: Designate a New SMCA Near Mishopshno/ Carpinteria with an Allowance for Recreational Take of Finfish by Hook-and-Line From Shore and a Tribal Take Exemption for Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (2023-29MPA_AM2)

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

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

Summary of CDFW tribal outreach for all 2023 MPA petitions

Since receiving the petitions, CDFW has provided regular updates on the status of the 2023 MPA Petitions and petition evaluation process through email communications and mailed letters to the CDFW tribal contact list. The CDFW tribal contact list includes over 400 individuals across the state who represent and/or work for a California Native American tribe. The statewide list is maintained by CDFW's Tribal Liaison and includes people on the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) contact list and others who have elected to receive updates from CDFW related to tribes. These updates included offers for consultation and meetings between tribes and CDFW. In October 2025, CFGC and CDFW sent letters via email and postal mail to the CDFW tribal contact list to specifically offer formal consultation or informal meetings on the 2023 MPA Petitions. CDFW also presented written and verbal updates at meetings of CFGC's Tribal Committee. These outreach efforts to tribes are summarized in Table 2.

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

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

- 2023-19MPA submitted by Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- 2023-20MPA submitted by Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
- 2023-21MPA submitted by Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
- 2023-29MPA submitted by Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (SYBCI), and Environmental Defense Center

At the May 7, 2025, meeting, CFGC's Tribal Committee requested CDFW send additional offers to all tribes for consultation on the remaining 2023 MPA Petitions and to reach out to offer to meet with tribes associated with the Tribally-led petitions. On October 16,

2025, CDFW distributed to the CDFW statewide tribal contact list a letter offering joint tribal consultation with CDFW and CFGC on any 2023 MPA Petition. This letter was also included in the fall quarterly CDFW Tribal Updates email. As of July 2026, no tribes have requested consultation.

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

At the December 9, 2025, CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, the CFGC Tribal Committee reconsidered the designation of petition 2023-28MPA and recommended CFGC designate it as a Tribally-led petition in light of the November 2025 co-sponsorship from Northern Chumash Tribal Council. At the December 11, 2025, CFGC meeting, CFGC designated petition 2023-28MPA as a Tribally-led petition. CFGC's Tribal Committee requested that before releasing the Tribally-led petition evaluations, CDFW engage with the tribes leading or co-leading petitions, including to better understand the intent of the petitions, and then share an update on the engagement and any clarifications on the petitions at the April 14, 2026 CFGC Tribal Committee meeting. CFGC's Tribal Committee and CFGC reaffirmed that CDFW should use the Evaluation Framework approved by CFGC in August to evaluate the Tribally-led petitions.

At the February 11, 2026, CFGC meeting, CFGC approved the addition of an agenda item for CDFW to provide an update and to have a discussion on the Tribally-led petitions at the April 14, 2026, Tribal Committee meeting.

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

At the April 14, 2026, CFGC Tribal Committee meeting, tribal representatives provided an overview and clarifications for the five Tribally-led petitions. SYBCI proposed amendments to 2023-19MPA, 2023-20MPA, and SYBCI and NRDC proposed amendments to 2023-29MPA_AM1. Northern Chumash Tribal Council and NRDC proposed amendments to 2023-28MPA_AM1. No amendments were proposed for 2023-21MPA. CDFW presented an update on tribal outreach and engagement since December and summarized the clarifications and proposed amendments for the Tribally-led petitions. At the meeting on April 15, 2026, the CFGC Tribal Committee recommended to CFGC that CDFW evaluate the Tribally-led petitions according to the proposed amendments and clarifications discussed during the meeting. CFGC subsequently referred the amended petitions (2023-19MPA_AM1, 2023-20MPA_AM1, 2023-21MPA_AM1, 2023-29MPA_AM2, and 2023-29MPA_AM2) to CDFW for evaluation using the Evaluation Framework approved by CFGC in August 2025.

Table 2. Summary of CDFW tribal outreach and engagement to date related to the 2023 MPA Petitions and petition process, including communication method and type of content. Unless otherwise specified, all tribal outreach communications included tribes listed on the CDFW tribal contact list maintained by CDFW's Department Tribal Liaison, which includes 400 people from the NAHC Contact List and additional tribal representatives.

Date	Method	Content
5/31/2024	Email	Released Blog Post: Seeking Your Feedback to Help Manage California's Marine Protected Area Network
10/4/2024	Email	CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update: Background, DMR petition process, next steps, upcoming meetings
10/25/2024	Email	Released Blog Post: MPA Day
11/22/2024	Email	CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update: Background, DMR petition process, next steps, upcoming meetings
4/11/2025	Email	CDFW Tribal Liaison provided Department update email, including CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update
5/7/2025	Tribal Committee: Meeting Materials	Written Informational Update: California's Marine Protected Area Network Decadal Management Review and Subsequent Marine Protected Area Regulation Amendment Petition Process (pg. 99 of 129) Verbal update on the 2023 MPA Petitions and draft evaluation framework by Susan Ashcraft, CFGC Marine Advisor
8/14/2025	Tribal Committee: Meeting Presentation	Presentation by Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager, on 2023 MPA Petitions and draft evaluation framework. Tribal Committee identified four Tribally-led petitions
9/2025	Email	CDFW invitation to meet to discuss petitions sent to petitioners for the four Tribally-led petitions
10/16/2025	Mail	Invitation Letter for joint tribal consultation with CDFW and CFGC on any 2023 MPA Petition
10/17/2025	Email	CDFW Tribal Liaison - Department update email, including CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update and Invitation Letter for Joint Tribal Consultation
10/20/2025 – 6/24/2026	Meetings	Discuss Tribally-led petitions with tribal petitioners

Date	Method	Content
12/9/2025	Tribal Committee	CDFW update on the 2023 MPA Petitions and upcoming release of CDFW petition evaluations and outlining three regional meetings to be held to discuss petitions and evaluations
4/14/2026	Tribal Committee	CDFW presentation to provide an update on tribal outreach and engagement, and summarize clarifications and proposed amendments for Tribally-led petitions
6/26/2026	Email	CDFW Tribal Liaison provided Department update email, including CDFW Informational MPA DMR Petition Process Update and upcoming meetings to discuss the 2023 MPA Petitions

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND MPAS

Since implementation of California’s MPA Network, the state’s coastal ecosystems have experienced increasingly significant climate-driven changes, including marine heatwaves, ocean acidification, and shifting species distributions. Although climate change was not explicitly incorporated into the MLPA Initiative planning process, the MPA Network was designed using resilience-oriented principles. Foundational design elements such as habitat replication, larval connectivity, and varying levels of protection were incorporated conservatively to support biodiversity, ecological function, and ecosystem resilience under uncertain and changing environmental conditions, including natural disturbances, decadal oceanographic variability, and unanticipated increases in fishing pressure.

MPAs are most effective at reducing extractive pressures, and their contribution to climate resilience depends in part on whether they measurably enhance key network attributes, such as connectivity, habitat replication, and protection of climate refugia. CDFW evaluated whether proposed changes were likely to meaningfully contribute to MPA Network performance through improvements to connectivity, habitat redundancy, or related ecological functions or provide measurable ecological benefits relative to the current performance of the MPA Network. Where existing MPAs already meet the SAT Science Guidelines established during the MLPA Initiative planning process, and proposals do not provide evidence the proposed change would demonstrably improve connectivity, redundancy, or resilience under changing environmental conditions and as specifically defined in the SAT Science Guidelines, the addition or expansion of a protected area alone is insufficient to conclude that climate resilience would be enhanced. Although there is broad evidence of increasing environmental stressors, restricting fishing alone will not address their cumulative impact. The existence of multiple stressors does not justify specific boundary modifications or new MPAs in the

absence of strong evidence that the proposal would likely result in site-specific ecological benefits.

MPAs may confer some resiliency to climate change by providing a buffer from some of these stressors, especially MPAs that limit or completely exclude fishing. Management of California's fisheries is mandated by the Marine Life Management Act, which includes objectives such as ecosystem protection, sustainability, and rebuilding populations, among others (Fish & G. Code § 7050). While the primary function of MPAs in California is to protect and enhance marine habitats and populations, understanding how effective fisheries management measures interact with a functioning MPA Network to bolster resiliency to climate change in California is still a critical knowledge gap identified in the DMR to be addressed through implementation of Recommendations 26–28 that focus on influencing factors and fisheries integration.

The absence of demonstrable ecological gains is particularly relevant where proposed changes could result in substantial socioeconomic impacts to ocean users. This underscores the importance of grounding management decisions in clear, place-based specific evidence of functional ecological improvement and considering socioeconomic impacts so that anticipated conservation benefits are considered relative to potential trade-offs in those areas.

CDFW 2023 MPA BIN 2 PETITION EVALUATION

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Question 1: Does the proposed change support the MPA Network in meeting one or more of the MLPA Goals and align with MPA Master Plan adaptive management objectives?

The MLPA Goals and Master Plan objectives are inextricably linked and act as the foundational tools that CDFW utilizes for effective adaptive management of the MPA Network. Individual MPAs in the MPA Network were not necessarily designed to address all six Goals of the MLPA but instead act as an important component of a functioning MPA Network that was designed to holistically address the MLPA Goals. As such, CDFW has evaluated the proposed actions within the broader adaptive management framework and how the proposed action may or may not align with the MLPA Goals/Master Plan objectives and advance MPA Network management.

MLPA Goals

1. Protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function and integrity of marine ecosystems.

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

Master Plan Adaptive Management Objectives

- Protect the structure and function of marine ecosystems
- Improve native marine life populations, including those of economic value
- Ensure minimal disturbance while allowing for sustainable opportunities for recreation, education and research
- Ensure comprehensive representation of all key habitats, including unique habitats
- Use learning acquired through administration of the MPA Management Program to adaptively manage the objectives, management measures, enforcement efforts, and scientific guidelines to inform management decisions
- MPAs function as a cohesive statewide network

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

[California's Marine Protected Area Network Decadal Management Review](#)
[DMR Adaptive Management Recommendations](#)

Question 5: Are there significant information gaps that need to be filled to inform the evaluation of the proposed change?

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

There are information gaps related to assessing issues around equity and access for traditionally underserved or marginalized communities within the existing MPA Network, as well as the proposed changes in the Bin 2 petitions. The DMR includes recommendations to advance work in this area that the MPA Management Program intends to work on in the near future. Also, see response for Questions 14 and below.

Economic and Fiscal Impacts

The CFGC petition form, Petition to the California Fish and Game Commission for Regulation Change, requires the petitioner to complete the section, "Economic or Fiscal Impacts: Identify any known impacts of the proposed regulation change on revenues to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, individuals, businesses, jobs, other state agencies, local agencies, schools, or housing." Responses provided in the Bin 2 Petitions often had limited data related to potential economic and fiscal impacts, particularly those related to individuals or businesses, including individuals from the sport and commercial fishing industries. This may be due to limited time provided to petitioners to prepare petitions or to the limited existence of this data. However, given the scope and timeline of this analysis, CDFW did not have the ability to provide a supplemental analysis of the economic or fiscal impacts for the 73 changes proposed across the 15 Bin 2 Petitions.

Fish and Game Code section 2853 highlights that the Marine Life Protection Program (now the MPA Management Program) must include a process for the establishment, modification, or abolishment of existing MPAs or new MPAs, that involves 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 (Fish & G. Code § 7050 (b)(7)), and that facilitates the designation of MPAs consistent with the Master Plan adopted pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2855. Fish and Game Code section 2855 states that when making decisions regarding the siting of new MPAs and major modifications of existing MPAs, CDFW shall take into account relevant information including, but not limited to, the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of various alternatives.

CDFW's Bin 2 MPA Petition evaluations include preliminary assessments of socioeconomic impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries, but these assessments are not a substitute for the relevant information required by Fish and Game Code section 2855. The evaluations do not include an assessment of any socioeconomic benefits or impacts beyond impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries. Implementation of the regulatory changes proposed in the Bin 2 MPA Petitions are anticipated to have socioeconomic impacts, some of which may be significant to individuals or businesses; and additional data and information are needed to meet the level of analyses required by Fish and Game Code section 2855.

Question 9: Does the proposed change improve individual MPA or MPA Network design so that it better aligns with or meets the MPA science guidelines?

To ensure consistency across petition evaluations, CDFW developed a decision tree to evaluate if a proposed action would improve individual MPA or MPA Network design and/or improve alignment with the SAT Science Guidelines (Figure 1). The decision tree includes considerations such as whether the proposed change has the potential to affect the MPA's size or Level of Protection (LOP) and includes a framework to respond to the question. The science-based design criteria were developed by the SAT during the MLPA Initiative planning process to provide quantitative guidance for achieving network-scale ecological objectives (e.g., North Coast Study Region guidance [Executive Summary from the North Coast SAT Methods Used to Evaluate MPA Proposals](#)). While there were slight deviations between planning regions in the amount of individual habitat types necessary to meet habitat representation and replication targets, key design elements were consistent statewide. MPAs intended to contribute to ecological goals were required to be at least 9 square miles in size and meet one of the three highest LOPs (Very High, High, or Moderate-High). Importantly, the analysis focused not only on whether proposals meet SAT Science Guidelines, but on whether they would likely provide a net ecological benefit to the MPA Network in addition to meeting SAT Science Guidelines—that is, likely to have measurable improvements beyond existing conditions.

Levels of Protection

California's SAT developed the LOP framework during the MLPA Initiative planning process. California's SAT LOP framework is specifically designed to evaluate fishing-related impacts within the state's MPAs and considers the species that may be taken, the gear used, the geographic region, and the potential direct and indirect ecological effects of those activities on species and habitats. As a result, the SAT LOP framework is the most appropriate framework to use when considering proposed changes or additions to the MPA Network as it was tailor-made for evaluating and comparing California's MPAs.

The SAT LOP framework differs substantially in scope, structure, and application from the protection categories defined in Grorud-Colvert et al.'s (2021) MPA Guide¹. Although the MPA Guide provides a valuable global framework for making standardized comparisons of MPA outcomes worldwide, it is not an appropriate framework for evaluating California's 2023 MPA Petitions. The two frameworks were developed for different purposes, applied different criteria, and the frameworks differ in scale and structure. Given the two frameworks have different scales and approaches, protection categories

¹ Grorud-Colvert et al. (2021). The MPA Guide: A framework to achieve global goals for the ocean. *Science* **373**, eabf0861(2021). DOI:10.1126/science.abf0861; see also <https://mpa-guide.protectedplanet.net/resources>

that appear similar in name may represent substantially different regulatory conditions and ecological outcomes under the two systems.

The MPA Guide was designed to compare MPAs globally as MPAs around the world vary from fully protected with strong implementation measures (such as those in California's MPA Network), to MPAs on paper only or those that allow activities such as intensive fishing and/or large impact infrastructure and aquaculture. The MPA Guide uses broad activity-based classifications that consider multiple categories of human use. Fishing is treated as one of several activity categories evaluated. Others include dredging and dumping, anchoring, infrastructure, aquaculture, non-extractive activities, and mining. The MPA Guide includes protection levels based on the number and types of activities allowed, without differentiating by species, fine-scale gear type(s), or geographic context. The MPA Guide captures the global scale of allowed activities in MPAs worldwide and categorizes these into four LOPs. The approach enables comparisons across global habitats and activities, which vary greatly. In contrast, California's SAT LOP framework has six levels of protection and is specifically tailored to the fisheries, gear types, species, and habitats in the MLPA planning regions, which enable precise assessments of potential contribution to ecological goals as well as comparisons within California's MPA Network.

In addition to being more relevant to California, the SAT LOP framework applies a more precautionary approach than the MPA Guide framework. During the MLPA Initiative planning process, the SAT evaluated allowed activities under the assumption that they could occur at maximum plausible intensity over time. This reflected the expectation that MPA access would remain open to all users and that fishing pressure could increase unpredictably in the future. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, California experienced an unanticipated surge in the harvest of intertidal organisms for sale and subsistence. By comparison, under the MPA Guide LOP framework, potential future increases or sudden changes in fishing intensity, such as the example described above, are not explicitly incorporated into protection level assignments. Instead, the 2021 MPA Guide evaluates activities based on their current intensity, scale, duration, frequency, and overall present-day impact. Its framework is therefore intended to categorize MPAs according to contemporary cumulative impact levels rather than to distinguish in detail among specific fishing practices or ecological interactions. Consequently, the LOPs between the two frameworks are not comparable, and the SAT LOP framework is the most appropriate framework to use for evaluating the 2023 MPA Petitions.

Please see the [CDFW Science Guide to California's MPA Network](#) for more specific information on science evaluation of MPA proposals during the MLPA Initiative planning process, including LOPs, as well as a current assessment of how the MPA Network conforms to the SAT Science Guidelines.

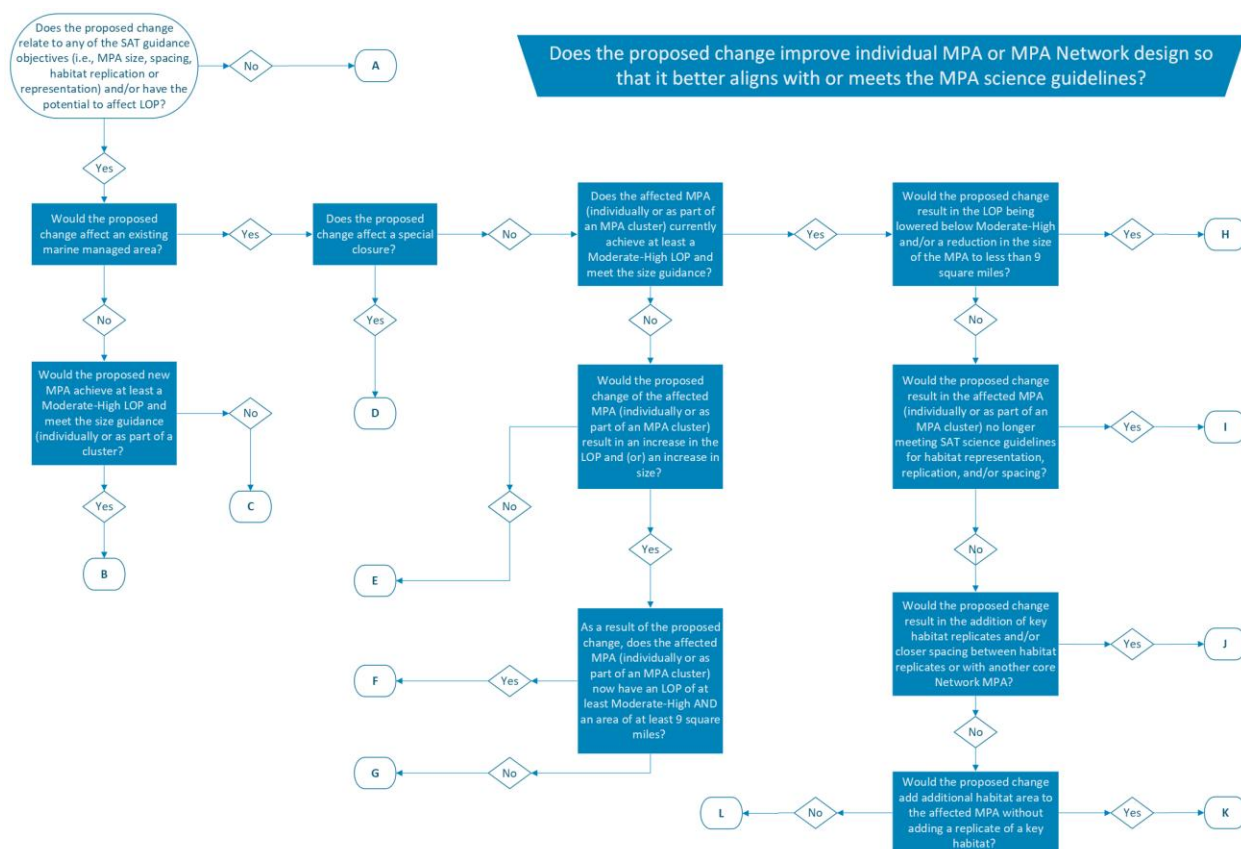


Figure 1. Decision tree framework used to formulate responses for Question 9 for each proposed action. The starting point, at the upper left corner, is based on whether the proposed change has the potential to affect the MPA's size or Level of Protection (LOP). The rest of the questions help to identify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

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

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

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

[CDFW Feasibility Guidelines](#)

Question 14: Does the proposed change provide more equitable access opportunities (e.g., fishing, educational, and/or other recreational opportunities) for traditionally underserved or marginalized communities?

CDFW is committed to improving access to marine resources in California for traditionally underserved and marginalized communities. This question was included in

the evaluation framework because of that commitment, as well as input from partners to prioritize improvement of accessibility and recommendations from the DMR to integrate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion principles into MPA Network management. However, after exploration of the available information and methods that could be used to address this question for each proposed action, CDFW originally determined that providing the level of evaluation this question and the relevant communities deserve would not be possible within the scope and timeline of the petition evaluations. Most of the petitions did not include sufficient information to accurately assess benefits and/or impacts to historically marginalized and underserved communities. Additional details and outreach were needed by petitioners to support this portion of the analysis.

At the time, CDFW reviewed multiple information sources, and found there are many different approaches to defining and identifying “traditionally underserved or marginalized communities.” CDFW reviewed the definition of disadvantaged communities (DACs) in Senate Bill 535, which is based on pollution burden and federally recognized tribal status (a map of DACs per this definition is [available here](#), data used to determine community status is available through the [CalEnviroScreen tool](#)).

CDFW also considered the definition of DACs utilized by the California Department of Water Resources, where DACs are areas where median annual household income is 80% or less of the statewide median annual household income ([a map of those communities is available here](#)).

CDFW found the data and information in the California Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation’s [Vulnerable Communities Platform](#) to be valuable in understanding access issues related to the MPA Network. The Vulnerable Communities Platform provides information on more specific and potentially applicable metrics, such as food insecurity and linguistic isolation, which could be used to better understand access issues (e.g., subsistence fishing, language access for outreach materials, [individual indicators data is available here](#)).

In the March 2026 Companion Document, CDFW’s primary findings for Question 14 were that additional information and time were needed, including completion of some DMR Recommendations, to sufficiently address the question.

Following CDFW’s submission of the petition evaluations, CFGC, CDFW, and Ocean Protection Council received substantive feedback identifying two areas of concern. First, the response to Question 14 was unsatisfactory and that people, including Commissioners, wanted to see additional analysis for Questions 14 and 16. Second, people identified a broader need for more robust engagement with, and meaningful

incorporation of the perspectives of, traditionally underserved and marginalized communities throughout the process.

At the Regional 2023 MPA Petitions meeting on May 19, 2026, CFGC directed CDFW to convene experts in Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion within the agency and at partner agencies to provide additional analyses. CDFW's Deputy Director of Strategic Engagement, Equity, and Partnerships led this work in collaboration with California Natural Resources Agency, CFGC staff, and Ocean Protection Council and released a separate document with supplemental information for Question 14 and 16.

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

CFGC staff conducted this analysis and prepared the response to Question 16, which was supplemented by a July 2026 document prepared as described in the paragraph above.

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Overview

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

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

Evaluation of MPA Petitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tribally-Led Petitions

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

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

Petitioner Intent

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

Current and Future Focus

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

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

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

Links

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

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

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

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

Coastal Fishing Communities Policy Overview

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

Evaluation of MPA Petitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Links

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

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

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

SUMMARY OF OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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