

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Location of the Project Area

The proposed project area comprises all coastal and island areas of California. The California coast can be divided into three regions, each of which has different oceanographic characteristics and resident abalone species (Figure 1-1):

1. The Northern California Region, which extends from the California-Oregon border south to San Francisco Bay, excluding the Farallon Islands
2. The Central California Region, which extends from San Francisco Bay, including the Farallon Islands, south to Point Conception. This area includes:
 - The Central California Sea Otter Range. This area is excluded from management
 - The Central California Region not occupied by sea otters. This area's recovery and management falls under the Southern California Region guidelines due to its location within the abalone fishing moratorium area (FGC §5521)
3. The Southern California Region, which extends from Point Conception to the California-Mexico border, including southern California offshore islands

Abalone distribution varies in California (Figure 1-2). Green abalone, *Haliotis fulgens*; pink abalone, *H. corrugata*; and white abalone, *H. sorenseni*, are primarily found in the Southern California Region. Pinto abalone, *H. kamtschatkana* (including *H.k. assimilis*); black abalone, *H. cracherodii*; and flat abalone, *H. walallenis*, are found in all three Regions. Red abalone, *H. rufescens*, is also found in all three Regions, but its distribution in the Southern California Region is restricted to areas of cold, upwelling water. The threaded abalone, *H. assimilis*, once thought to be a separate species, has been made synonymous with the pinto abalone *H. kamtschatkana* (Geiger 2000).

1.2 Purpose and Need for Action

Management authority for abalone has been delegated to the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) by the Legislature with the intent that it undertake management in a manner consistent with the Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP) [Fish and Game Code (FGC) §5520]. The Department of Fish and Game (Department) is required by the State Legislature to prepare an Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP) for all of California's abalones (FGC §5522). The purpose of the ARMP is to provide a cohesive framework to direct recovery efforts, and to manage existing and future fisheries. The ARMP serves to prioritize short-term and identify long-term assessment, research, regulatory, and enforcement activities. Integrating these activities ensures effective sharing of available Department resources between recovery and management.

The history of the California abalone fishery points to the need for defined recovery and management guidelines. At one time, five species of abalone (red, pink, green, black, and white) supported recreational and commercial fisheries in California.

However, by 1997 central and southern California abalones had experienced stock collapse from both natural and human-related causes, resulting in the closure of all abalone fishing in those areas. The only abalone fishery currently open in the state is the red abalone sport fishery in the Northern California Region.

The five formerly fished species in the Central and Southern California Regions are at risk of further population declines and, in one case, extinction. The white abalone has been listed as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act, while the black abalone is a candidate for listing. Without human intervention, and possibly even with it, these species may never recover. The recovery portion of the ARMP is directed at preventing further population declines and rebuilding populations.

Managing the northern California red abalone resource in a sustainable fashion is critical for the survival of the State's last remaining abalone fishery. A sustainable management framework will also be important for any abalone species that recovers to a level considered sustainable for fishing. The management portion of the ARMP addresses recreational and commercial fisheries that may re-open in the future, as well as the current red abalone recreational fishery. Abalone management under the ARMP will be responsive to changes in stock conditions that result from either natural or human-induced causes.

1.3 Specific Goals of the Plan

As the trustee agency for the State's fish and wildlife resources, the Department's overall goal is to manage those resources for optimum long-term benefits for the people of the State.

The interim goals for the ARMP are to reverse declines in populations by stabilizing all abalone species, and establish self-sustaining populations range-wide. The long-term goal is to attain resource levels that can sustain fisheries.

The interim management goal for the ARMP is to institute an adaptive plan that employs a precautionary approach to managing the existing red abalone fishery in northern California using available Department resources and data. The long-term goal is to implement a plan which may incorporate tag-based, zonal management using more extensive data collection, which would allow for more refined and responsive regulatory actions. Once implemented, the long-term goal should apply to all California abalone fisheries.

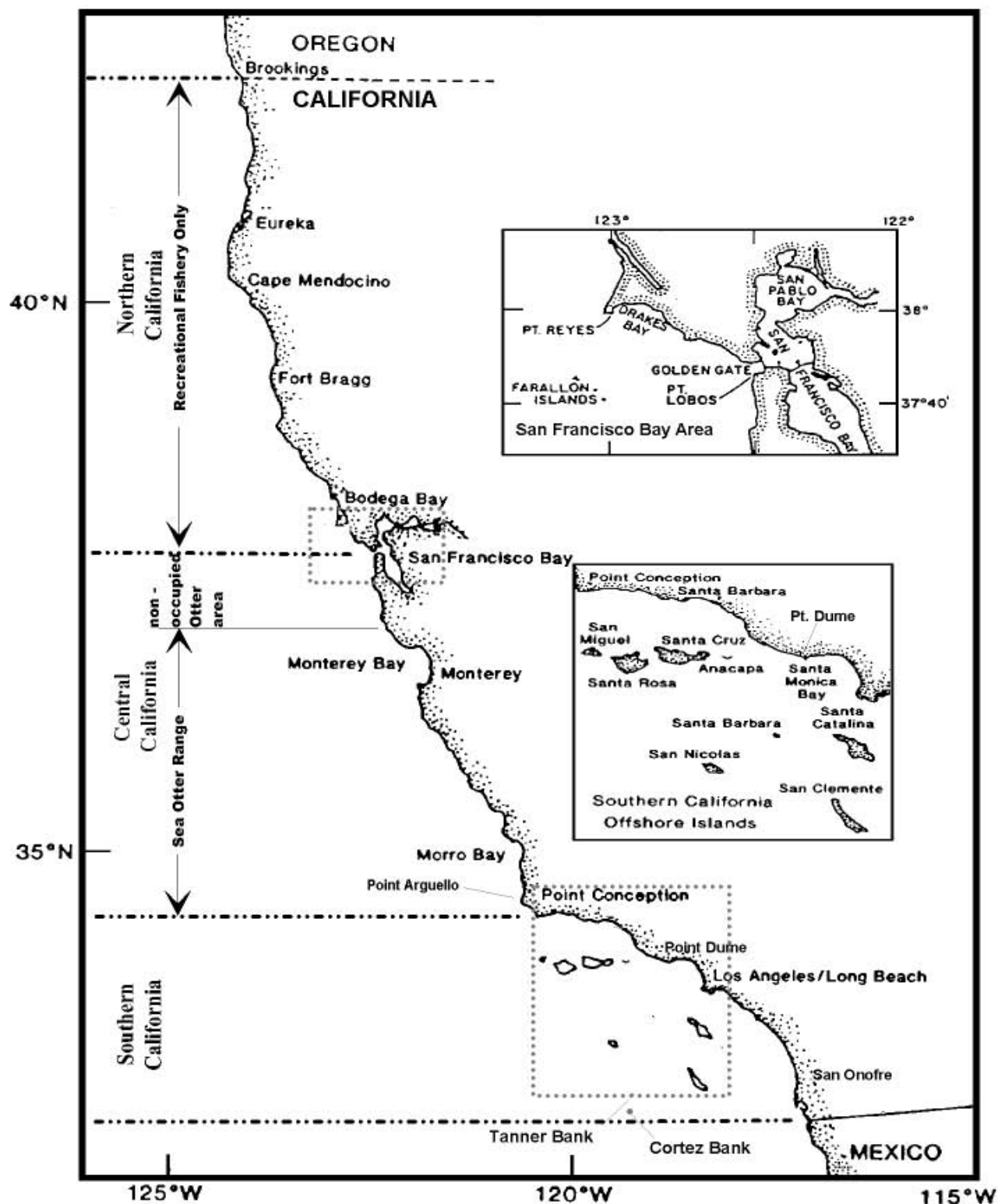


Figure 1-1. Map of California identifying regions, islands and points used in document

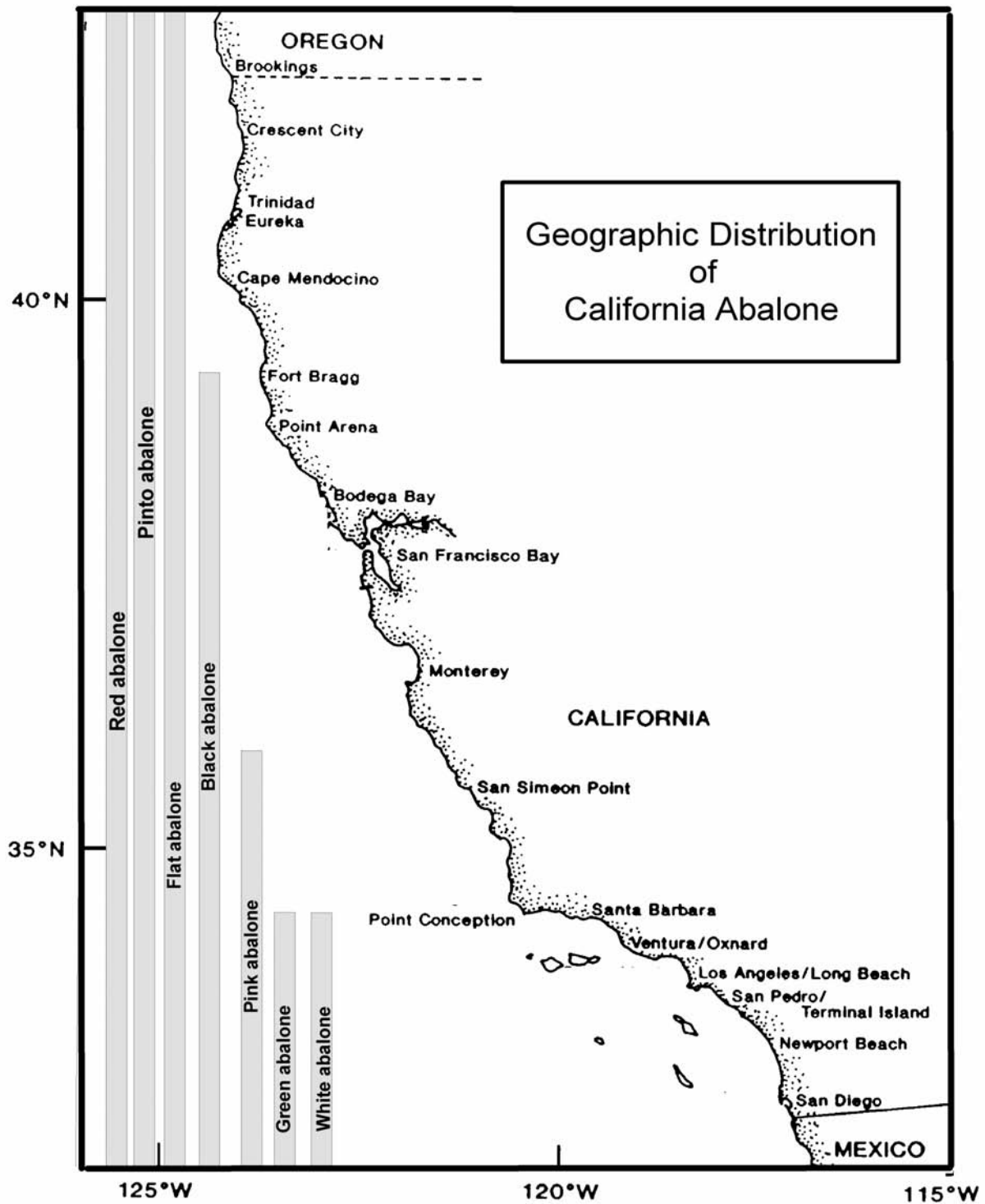


Figure 1-2. The geographic distribution of abalone species in California