

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Update on the MLPA Initiative as Required in the Memorandum of Understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) among the State of California's Resources Agency and Department of Fish and Game and the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation structures the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative (MLPAI). The MOU was signed in August 2004. This is the first semi-annual report required in the MOU.

The main organizational structures of the MLPAI include:

1. The MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) with eight members, which leads the MLPAI, appointed in September 2004. The BRTF has held three meetings: October in Sacramento; January in Long Beach and February in Monterey. The fourth meeting is in April in Pasadena.
2. A Master Plan Science Advisory Team, now 22 members, appointed in January 2005. The SAT has held three meetings: January, February and March, all in Oakland. The SAT has a chair and now has two graduate students providing meeting support.
3. A small MLPAI staff, including an executive director, a senior project manager, a central coast project manager and an operations and communications manager, all appointed in November 2004.
4. An MLPAI Steering Committee, chaired by the executive director, and including the Senior Project Manager, Operations and Communications Director, the Central Coast Project Manager and three representatives of the Department of Fish and Game: a policy advisor, MLPA regional coordinator, and MPA mandates coordinator. The DFG MLPA statewide technical advisor has also joined the Steering Committee.
5. A Statewide Interests Group (SIG) composed of 27 members and alternates, appointed in January 2005. The SIG meets only by telephone conference calls, occurring to date in January, February and March 2005.

The MOU sets five deliverables for the Marine Life Protection Initiative and progress has been made in most areas:

- Master Plan Framework submitted to DFG for submission to the California Fish and Game Commission by May 2005. The Master Plan Framework (MPF) is in final draft form, to be considered for approval by the BRTF April 11-12, 2005. The MPF has gone through three drafts, each being available on the web for public comment, and two rounds of comment by BRTF members and the public.
- Comprehensive strategy for long-term funding by December 2005. A background paper on costs of MPAs has been prepared, some potential funding sources identified and contracts are pending with two consultants for this work.

NOTE: To better influence the 2006-07 budget, some aspects of this deliverable need to be accelerated to summer 2005.
- Develop a draft proposal for alternative networks of MPAs for an area within the central coast by March 2006. Following discussions in the SAT and three public workshops (Bodega Bay, Santa Cruz and Morro Bay) involving nearly 200 participants, designation of the central coast study region received public comment at the February BRTF meeting in Monterey. Lack of a quorum precluded final action but that is expected on April 11. The central coast project manager has just been brought on board and negotiations have opened with a firm

to facilitate the central coast project. The core MLPAL staff is developing a refined, detailed work plan.

- Develop recommendations for coordinating the management of MPAs with the federal government by November 2006. In preparation for the central coast project, a working agreement regarding GIS data and decision tools, and a commitment for further cooperation, has been reached with the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Interests of the military services have been accommodated in the Master Plan Framework. Comments on the Master Plan Framework were solicited from federal agencies and appropriate changes made where feasible.
- Secure agreement and commitment among state agencies with marine protected area responsibilities by November 2006 to complete a statewide implementation of the Master Plan by 2011. Comments from other state agencies were solicited on the Master Plan Framework and appropriate changes made where feasible. We have initiated contacts with the State Coastal Conservancy and the California Coast Commission.

In keeping with the goals of wide participation and transparency these steps have been taken:

- Video and audio records of BRTF and SAT meetings are available on the web, usually within 48 hours of meetings
- BRTF meetings are being simultaneously webcast
- Two-way video teleconferencing to remote sites was attempted at the January BRTF meeting, with partial success, and will be attempted again in April
- Public comments are invited at BRTF and SAT meetings
- Each BRTF meeting includes a stakeholder panel addressing the major issue of that meeting
- All MLPAL documents and comments received on those documents are in the process of being made available on the website
- The BRTF chair has made several appearances at meetings of stakeholders and the BRTF has met with stakeholders in Long Beach and Monterey

Challenges:

1. The MLPAL needs budget flexibility, but the initial budget used with funders allocates funds to categories that do not match the needs as now understood
2. MOU design includes an ambitious time schedule with minimal staffing
3. The initial start up time was delayed which aggravated the tight schedule
4. All initial MLPAL staff members are senior; few "troops" are available
5. Legal exposure issues are not recognized in the MOU but are being addressed

Major task for near term: Marshalling and deploying the resources to undertake the Central Coast Project, characterized by high stakes and a tight time schedule. Success will require additional human resources and capacity to adapt quickly.