

**California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative:
Proposed Interested Public and Stakeholder Involvement Strategies**

The success of the MLPA Initiative depends to a large degree on meaningful public and stakeholder input into the work of the Blue Ribbon Task Force (Task Force) and Master Plan Science Advisory Team (Science Team) in developing the draft Master Plan Framework and the Central Coast MLPA Project. This paper presents the recommendations of RESOLVE, Inc., based upon consultation with the partners to the MLPA Initiative memorandum of understanding and MLPA stakeholders. In brief, the Task Force is encouraged to adopt the following strategies for involving the interested public and stakeholders, and to consider the menu of supplemental strategies under appropriate circumstances, to ensure that quality public and stakeholder information is included in the recommendations that the Task Force delivers to the Department of Fish and Game:

- ∞ Interested Public Involvement Opportunities
 - Open Task Force and Science Team meetings
 - Public comment period at each Task Force meeting
 - Written public comment on draft documents
 - Responsive decision-making
 - Effective web technologies
- ∞ Core Stakeholder Involvement Strategies
 - Stakeholder panel presentations at each Task Force meeting
 - Statewide Stakeholder Coordination Group
 - Central Coast MLPA Stakeholder Group
 - Semi-annual roundtable discussions
 - Plan for stakeholder involvement published on Task Force web site
- ∞ Supplemental Stakeholder Strategies
 - Individual interviews with stakeholders by key consultants
 - Study tours for Task Force members and stakeholders
 - Constituency-hosted meetings
 - Local community profiles
 - Joint fact finding
 - Group interest analysis
 - Educational workshops
 - Strategic Surveys

Background

Both the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) and the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) emphasize involving affected parties, including commercial fishing interests, sports fishermen and other recreational users, conservationists, scientists and others in developing and evaluating management proposals for marine resources. The MLPA intends for local communities to provide relevant information and other

comments on the statewide and regional proposals, including firsthand observations, socioeconomic information, and suggestions for monitoring, evaluation and stewardship of the marine protected areas. The Blue Ribbon Task Force (Task Force) appointed by the Secretary for Resources aims to fulfill this legislative intent through a variety of strategies designed to provide opportunities for the public and stakeholders to contribute to the policy and scientific proposals developed by the Task Force.

This paper proposes strategies that the Task Force may adopt to ensure robust public and stakeholder involvement. The recommendations differentiate between “interested public” and “stakeholder” strategies.

- ∄ The interested public strategies are those that any person on their own initiative can avail themselves of, to follow and provide input into the work of the Task Force.
- ∄ The stakeholder strategies are those that will solicit the views of those with a direct interest in the marine environment

These recommendations grow both from the professional experience of the consultants, and through consultation with MLPA stakeholders in a series of roundtables held between August 31 and September 1, 2004. (See “MLPA Constituent Involvement Roundtable Summary” for process comments made by stakeholders.). Among the recommendations are those marked with an asterisk that the Task Force is encouraged to adopt now, followed by a menu of other supplemental strategies that can be implemented in various combinations, to the degree that the Task Force and stakeholders find those strategies productive and effective for specific objectives.

Interested Public Strategies

Throughout the MLPA Initiative, the general public will have regular and frequent opportunities to observe and comment on the work of the Blue Ribbon Task Force and the Master Plan Science Advisory Team. As described in the memorandum of understanding, the proceedings of the Task Force and the Science Team will be transparent to the public.

***Open Task Force and Science Team Meetings:** All meetings of the Task Force and Science Team where a majority of the members is scheduled to attend will be noticed in advance and open to the public. Meeting agendas and supporting materials will be available in advance for public review, using standard message dissemination techniques such as the Internet, e-mail, list servers, occasional mailings and other methods on special request. Depending on the technology used at each meeting, either written meeting summaries or recordings will be available on request (the latter perhaps for a small fee to cover costs).

*Public Comment Period at Task Force Meetings: The agenda of each Task Force meeting will include a brief public comment period for any subject related to the MLPA Initiative. The points made will be briefly identified in written meeting summaries.

*Written Public Comment: The public may direct written comments to the Task Force in response to any materials made publicly available supporting the work of the Task Force, especially key documents being considered for adoption by the Task Force. Written comments received (or summaries if that is more feasible) will be available to the public.

*Responsive Decision Making: The Task Force and Science Team will consider public comments and questions while developing final versions of key documents and will make an effort to articulate the ways in which comments received were reflected in decisions made or the reasons they were not, recognizing they may not be able to respond specifically to each comment submitted.

*Web Technologies: The Task Force will enhance its website, www.MLPATaskForce.org, to include functions such as a list server, a web log, and perhaps a web-cam simulcast of meetings. These types of functions will be implemented, to the extent that the manageability and cost of these technologies is not prohibitive. The Task Force will coordinate its website with that of the Department of Fish and Game (Department) to the extent possible, to avoid duplication of information on the Internet.

Core Stakeholder Involvement Strategies

The principal focus of improving stakeholder involvement in marine management and conservation draw upon years of planning and meetings with stakeholders. These strategies go beyond the traditional methods of interested public observation and comment to foster direct and useful communication among those with a direct stake in our coastal and marine resources and those developing the draft Master Plan Framework and Central Coast MLPA Project.

*Stakeholder Panels: At Task Force meetings, panels of approximately five to seven stakeholders will be asked to provide their perspectives on a question or issue posed in advance of the meeting. The purpose is to encourage a cross-section of stakeholders to engage in dialogue with one another and with the Task Force and to offer recommendations or other points of consideration on an issue to be discussed by the Task Force at that meeting. Speakers will be selected based on expertise by the Executive Director, in consultation with the Stakeholder Coordination Group (see below).

*Statewide Stakeholder Coordination Group: This group will include ten to fifteen representatives of key constituent groups throughout the state, to serve as an additional mechanism for two-way communication between the Task Force and its stakeholders about the approach and activities of the MLPA Initiative and about policy issues of statewide concern. This group will meet via facilitated conference call convened by the

Chair or the Executive Director, about three or four weeks prior to each Task Force meeting, to respond to specific questions posed by the Chair or Executive Director, and to help recommend panel speakers for the upcoming Task Force meeting.

*Central Coast MLPA Stakeholder Group: This group will include ten to fifteen key stakeholders from the central coast region who can provide biological, socioeconomic and other local community information and perspectives that will assist the Central Coast Project Manger to develop a proposal for alternative networks of marine protected areas along the Central Coast. The Director of the Department and the Central Coast Project Manager will solicit nominations, and jointly select from the nominees a representative group that will meet regularly, most often in person, over two years to provide input to the development of the Central Coast MLPA Project.

*Periodic Stakeholder Roundtable Discussions: Approximately twice a year, the Task Force will host facilitated discussions with stakeholders. The discussions will be timed to provide a meaningful opportunity for stakeholders to provide input into key work products or deliverables that are being drafted and considered by either the Task Force or the Science Team. The objectives of the discussions will be to elicit possible solutions to challenges identified by the Task Force or the Science Team.

*Publish Stakeholder Involvement Plan and Flow Chart: To communicate what opportunities exist for stakeholder involvement, the Task Force will put this *Interested Public and Stakeholder Involvement Strategies* document or a revised version, as approved, on its web site and will circulate it widely to describe the core and supplemental interested public and stakeholder involvement activities. In addition, the Task Force will create a flow chart with the major milestones of the MLPA Initiative, showing how and at what points in time these mechanisms for involvement might occur.

Supplemental Stakeholder Involvement Strategies

While facilitated meetings will play a prominent role in the MLPA Initiative, there are additional tools that can foster effective stakeholder involvement and integration of useful information, particularly in the regional project. These tools are gleaned from a survey of community-based fisheries management efforts around the world.

*Interviews: Selective one-on-one interviews in a stakeholder's community can solicit views of those known to have thoughtful views or knowledge, but are reluctant to share them in a public setting. An interview might concern itself mostly with distilling the views of a constituent or tapping into that person's special knowledge of a fishery, an area, or other important substantive matter. The interview would be conducted by a researcher or other contractor, and the interviews would be synthesized for consideration by the Task Force and Science Team.

*Study Tours: In a study tour, a group of Task Force members and MLPA stakeholders might travel to an area where marine protected areas already have been set up, or alternatively, invite participants from such an area to California. Study tours are designed to introduce decision-makers who are in the middle of deciding complex matters to others who have already worked their way through similar questions in a different place and to strengthen lines of communication between the Task Force and its stakeholders.

*Constituency-Hosted Meetings: Opportunities will be created for pairs or small groups of Task Force and/or Science Team members to visit with stakeholders in their constituents' communities. Through visits like this, panel members will have a rich opportunity to learn about the unique needs of the community and how various approaches to designing and managing marine protected areas could best protect both the natural resources and the key social and economic dynamics of the area.

Joint Development of Community Profiles: Jointly developed community profiles can help assess and address concerns about the potential impacts of marine protected areas on local communities. This approach would link social scientists and community members, and combine data and other information available from government, business, and civic institutions.

Joint Fact-finding Regarding Controversial Issues: Unlike the traditional coastal management process, joint fact-finding begins with developing a common set of issues and questions collaboratively. While the research itself most often is conducted by experts, defining the research objectives, agreeing on an approach (and on who conducts the research), and analyzing the resulting information can create mutual confidence in the information base for decisions. Joint fact-finding would likely be best applied in the regional project, particularly regarding controversial issues such as impacts and benefits of reserve networks for fisheries.

Group Interest Analysis: Soliciting the views of a broad range of the members of interest groups can give Task Force members a more detailed and nuanced understanding of stakeholders' interests and promote constructive involvement by stakeholders.

Educational Workshops: Workshops can be organized to increase stakeholder capacity to gather information relevant to the Task Force or Central Coast MLPA Project, on topics such as marine protected area management and stewardship, objectives, effect, enforcement, and monitoring or the management of fisheries, or the methods, potential, and limitations of social science research.

Surveys in Combination with Focus Groups: The Task Force might consider random sample surveys of stakeholders; however, such polls also may be limited by the public's surface impressions about the issues. Recent experiments attempt to integrate conventional survey techniques with workshops or focus groups.