

Executive Summary

The Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) which became law on January 1, 1999, mandates several significant changes in the way California's marine fisheries are managed and regulated. Its primary goals are to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of California's marine living resources for all the state's citizens. To that end, the MLMA requires that fishery management plans (FMPs) form the primary basis for managing the state's marine fisheries.

Due to the large number of marine fisheries in California, and the considerable time and effort involved in the preparation of FMPs, it is important to establish guidelines and set priorities. Accordingly, §7073 of the Fish and Game Code requires a Master Plan that specifies the process and resources needed to prepare, adopt, and implement FMPs for sport and commercial marine fisheries managed by the state. In effect, the Master Plan will serve as a roadmap for the development of future FMPs.

The costs associated with FMPs can be significant. The level of funding necessary to develop FMPs will depend upon many factors including the number of species, their geographic range, and the management alternatives suggested. Based on management plans currently in development, the costs to develop an FMP may range from \$1.4 million for updating an existing plan on a single species to \$6.6 million for a new FMP dealing with many species. Implementation costs are expected to represent the greatest share of an FMP's total costs. The funding required for FMPs is a fundamental issue needing resolution. Commercial fishermen, sport fishermen, and non-consumptive users will all likely provide some portion of the funding.

The Master Plan identifies over 375 marine fisheries managed by the state and describes three different approaches to prioritizing them for future FMPs. Ten groups representing 29 species were identified as in greatest need of management and conservation measures to comply with the policies of MLMA. The top three fisheries for future FMPs are sea urchins, California halibut, and nearshore sharks and rays.

Essential fishery information (EFI) is a key component in FMPs, and is integral to achieving sustainable fisheries management. The DFG continues to collect EFI using fishery-dependent and fishery-independent techniques. However, biological and socioeconomic information gaps still exist for the highest priority fisheries, and certain EFI, such as socioeconomics is almost entirely unavailable for most fisheries. The nature of missing EFI for a particular fishery can affect the costs of preparing and implementing an FMP.

The MLMA recognizes that successful marine fishery management is a collaborative process requiring ongoing communication and the participation of all those involved. The MLMA seeks to involve all interested persons in living marine resource management decisions including the development of this Master Plan, FMPs, and research protocols. The Master Plan benefited from considerable comment from members of the sport and commercial fishing industries, environmental and conservation groups, academic and scientific communities, and other interested persons. The Master Plan describes the DFG's preferred methods and activities for public involvement, and how interested persons can become involved at various stages of the FMP process.

All FMPs must stand on a foundation of good science. To ensure this, FMPs will undergo scientific peer review. Although the Master Plan is not a peer reviewed document, it will be reviewed at least every 4 years in order to keep it proactive, adaptive, and responsive to any changes affecting fisheries and FMPs.