

# Purpose and Overview

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The Marine Life Management Act (MLMA), which became law on Jan. 1, 1999, opened a new era in the management and conservation of living marine resources in California. The MLMA's overriding goal is to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of California's living marine resources, including the conservation of healthy and diverse marine ecosystems and living marine resources.

To achieve this goal, the MLMA established an innovative program for managing marine fisheries. Good fisheries managers periodically take stock of the effectiveness of their programs. With this in mind, the MLMA requires that the Department prepare an annual report on the status of sport and commercial marine fisheries managed by the state. The MLMA requires that these reports do three things: 1) identify any marine fishery that does not meet the MLMA's sustainability policies; 2) review restricted access programs; and 3) evaluate the management system and make recommendations for modifications. This first report presents the best available information for all marine and estuarine fisheries managed by the state. Under the MLMA, later annual reports will cover one-quarter of all marine and estuarine fisheries managed by the state.

The first section of *California's Living Marine Resources: A Status Report* is meant to provide lay people and specialists alike with the best available information on the oceanic, environmental, regulatory, and socioeconomic factors that affect the management affecting California's living marine resources. This discussion is divided into five chapters: *California's Variable Ocean Environment*, *The Status of Habitats and Water Quality in California's Coastal and Marine Environment*, *The Human Ecosystem Dimension*, *The Status of Marine Fisheries Law Enforcement* and *A Review of Restricted Access Programs*.

The second section of the report includes chapters on the three major ecosystems off California: nearshore, offshore, and bays and estuaries. Each of these chapters includes a description of the ecosystem, the major issues facing fisheries managers, and the management framework. These chapters also include evaluations of individual fisheries and species of marine wildlife, including a historical description of each fishery, the status of biological knowledge, and the status of the population. Management considerations submitted by authors for approximately half the individual fisheries are found in Appendix A.

The report concludes with chapters on *Aquaculture*, *Invasive Species*, and *Marine Birds and Mammals*.

