

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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Landmark “Central Coast” Marine Protected Areas will be in Effect September 21

California's Marine Life Protection Act Launched as First Region Opens

California's landmark Marine Life Protection Act will go into effect from Pigeon Point to Point Conception on Friday September 21. This action will establish a Central Coast Region, composed of 29 marine protected areas (MPAs), from San Mateo County to Santa Barbara County. The MPA designation significantly increases the protection that marine life living in the area receives. These protections include long-term safe havens for rockfish and other bottom fishes, migration corridors for salmon, and a diverse environment that abalone, kelp and numerous marine mammals and seabirds need to survive.

"These new marine protected areas will help us preserve some of California's most biologically significant marine habitats while also allowing for recreational and commercial fishing," said Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman, who noted that the central coast is the first of five regions that will eventually lead to a network of MPAs along the state's 1,100-mile coastline.

The 29 sites within the Central Coast MPA series represent approximately 204 square miles (roughly 18 percent) of state waters in the Central Coast Study Region (see list below). The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has developed a comprehensive website at www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/mpa/ccmpas_list.asp that includes regulations and detailed maps of each of the newly formed MPAs.

This final network of Central Coast MPAs is the result of a landmark unanimous vote in April by the California Fish and Game Commission. It represents the culmination of a two-year public process that began in February of 2005. The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Program was designed to advance the conservation of marine resources for their long-term sustainable use while also enhancing outdoor recreation and ocean research opportunities along the coast. The MLPA process was invigorated as a public-private partnership with the Resources Agency, the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation, the California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative, DFG and the Commission.

In addition, Gov. Schwarzenegger formed the California Ocean Protection Council and called for the development of a comprehensive Ocean Action Plan as part of the administration's progressive ocean management efforts, and in response to the Pew and U.S. Ocean Commissions' reports on the health of our oceans.

The process to designate the Central Coast MPAs involved the work of the Regional Stakeholder Group, and Science Advisory Team, an oversight role of the Blue Ribbon Task

Force, and included significant DFG analyses and recommendations. Nearly 60 public meetings were held in the development of the MPA proposals. Thousands of written and verbal public comments were also received and considered during the process.

The network of marine protected areas include:

- 15 State Marine Conservation Areas (SMCA), which limit recreational and commercial fishing;
- 13 "no-take" State Marine Reserves (SMR); a total of 85 square miles and;
- One State Marine Recreational Managed Area (SMRMA); Morro Bay State Marine Recreational Management Area, where recreational fishing is limited or restricted.

Ninety percent of the central coast area remains open to fishing. (Note: This percentage includes the limited fishing that is allowed in the SMCAs and SMRAs as well as the areas outside the series of MPAs). DFG's marine wardens will patrol and enforce the new MPAs, and continue to monitor fishing activities in other open areas of state waters (shore to 3 miles).

A main goal of the MLPA is to utilize these MPAs as research sites where scientists can gain a greater understanding of California's marine and coastal environment and how marine animals and plants interact with little or no disturbance by people.

"MPAs are designed to protect special places and ecosystems and provide a unique opportunity for scientific study," said Dr. Amber Mace, executive director of the California Ocean Science Trust (CalOST). Mace also serves as the science advisor to the California Ocean Protection Council. "We are now developing a long-term monitoring system to better understand MPA effects and to help inform how they are managed over time. MPAs can help the state's most important marine ecosystems to thrive, while potentially enhancing other uses such as wildlife viewing and fishing," she said.

DFG and the Ocean Protection Council have provided \$2 million to launch a variety of research projects designed to gauge the ecological and socioeconomic effects of the MPAs. Recreational anglers are playing a major role in this overall research endeavor by looking at fish stocks and the number of fish that inhabit local waters.

"Scientists working directly with anglers will study the before and after effects of the marine protected areas by comparing changes in fish populations that occur after the MPAs take effect," said Don Maruska, strategic advisor and facilitator of the California Collaborative Fisheries Research Program, which includes the cooperative efforts of university researchers, DFG and NOAA fisheries biologists and fishing experts.

The second phase of the MLPA Initiative, which will cover the North Central Coast region from Pigeon Point (San Mateo County) north to Alder Creek (Mendocino County), is already underway. For more information visit the DFG MLPA Web page at www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/mpa/.

The Central Coast Marine Protected Areas include:

- Año Nuevo State Marine Conservation Area
- Greyhound Rock State Marine Conservation Area

- Natural Bridges State Marine Reserve
- Elkhorn Slough State Marine Reserve
- Elkhorn Slough State Marine Conservation Area
- Moro Cojo Slough State Marine Reserve
- Soquel Canyon State Marine Conservation Area
- Portuguese Ledge State Marine Conservation Area
- Edward F. Ricketts State Marine Conservation Area
- Lovers Point State Marine Reserve
- Pacific Grove Marine Gardens State Marine Conservation Area
- Asilomar State Marine Reserve
- Carmel Pinnacles State Marine Reserve
- Carmel Bay State Marine Conservation Area
- Point Lobos State Marine Reserve
- Point Lobos State Marine Conservation Area
- Point Sur State Marine Reserve
- Point Sur State Marine Conservation Area
- Big Creek State Marine Reserve
- Big Creek State Marine Conservation Area
- Piedras Blancas State Marine Reserve
- Piedras Blancas State Marine Conservation Area
- Cambria State Marine Conservation Area
- White Rock (Cambria) State Marine Conservation Area
- Morro Bay State Marine Recreational Management Area
- Morro Bay State Marine Reserve
- Point Buchon State Marine Reserve
- Point Buchon State Marine Conservation Area
- Vandenberg State Marine Reserve

Editor's Note: High resolution DFG images taken in the Central Coast Region can be found at www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/mpa/photos.asp

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