What is a California marine protected area (or “MPA”)?

An MPA is a type of managed area whose main purpose is to protect or conserve marine life and habitats in ocean or estuarine waters. California’s MPA Network consists of 124 areas with varying levels of protection and 14 special closures, all designed to help safeguard the state’s marine ecosystems. Most marine conservation areas such as Blue Cavern Offshore State Marine Conservation Area provide some opportunity for commercial and/or recreational take (species and gear exceptions vary by location - see reverse).

One goal for California’s MPAs was to strategically place them near each other to form an interconnected network that would help to preserve the flow of life between marine ecosystems. Within that network each MPA has unique goals and regulations, and non-consumptive activities, permitted scientific research, monitoring, and educational pursuits may be allowed.

Why was this location chosen for a state marine conservation area?

One of the goals for Blue Cavern Offshore State Marine Conservation Area is to protect the sandy sea floor found there. Market squid lay egg cases along the deep sandy seafloor, and flatfish like California halibut and sole camouflage themselves in the ripples of sand that cross the ocean floor. Deepwater rocky reef habitat is used by a variety of fish, including rockfish and lingcod. Yellowtail, white seabass, and Pacific bonito roam the shallower waters in search of prey.

A portion of this area has been protected since 1974, when the State of California established the Northwest Santa Catalina Island Area of Special Biological Significance. The offshore conservation area shares a southern border with Blue Cavern Onshore State Marine Conservation Area. Placing a state marine conservation area here provides moderately high levels of protection for marine life and the habitats they use.

Quick Facts: Blue Cavern Offshore State Marine Conservation Area
- MPA size: 7.70 square miles
- Depth range: 267 to 2,616 feet
- Habitat composition:
  - Sand/mud: 7.70 square miles

Further Information:
- MPA Website: [www.wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/MPAs)
- MPA and Sportfishing Interactive Map: [www.wildlife.ca.gov/OceanSportfishMap](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/OceanSportfishMap)
- Email: AskMarine@wildlife.ca.gov

Photos - Upper: View of the conservation area and receding island shore, CDFW photo by L. Gatlin  Lower right: Market squid egg cases and orange gorgonians, CDFW/MARE photo  Lower left: Risso’s dolphin in the conservation area, photo © tegmort, CC BY-NC 2.0
Blue Cavern Offshore State Marine Conservation Area
Southern California - Santa Catalina Island

Established January, 2012

* Pelagic finfish are defined here as: northern anchovy (Engraulis mordax), barracudas (Sphyraena spp.), billfishes* (family Istiophoridae), dolphinfish (Coryphaena hippurus), Pacific herring (Clupea pallasii), jack mackerel (Trachurus symmetricus), Pacific mackerel (Scomber japonicus), salmon (Oncorhynchus spp.), Pacific sardine (Sardinops sagax), blue shark (Prionace glauca), salmon shark (Lamna ditropis), shortfin mako shark (Isurus oxyrinchus), thresher sharks (Alopias spp.), swordfish (Xiphias gladius), tunas (family Scombridae) including Pacific bonito (Sarda chiliensis), and yellowtail (Seriola lalandi).

*Marlin is not allowed for commercial take.

Take may be authorized for research, restoration, and monitoring purposes under a scientific collecting permit. See California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 632(a).

The information in this document does not replace the official regulatory language found in the California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 632. View these regulations online at www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Network.