

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative
Summary of Public Comments Received
Regarding NCRSG Draft Recommendations for Special Closures in the
MLPA North Coast Study Region
July 19, 2010

On July 6, 7 and 8, 2010, the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative hosted a series of public open houses to receive public feedback on Round 2 draft marine protected area (MPA) proposals and draft recommended special closures for the MLPA North Coast Study Region.

This document summarizes the key themes and major ideas that emerged from public comments about draft recommended special closures, gathered from the open houses and submitted to the MLPA Initiative through July 14, 2010. This document and a compilation of all the individual comments received through July 14, will be provided to the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) and MLPA North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCRSG) to help inform the development of Round 3 recommended special closures.

Information about the open houses and key themes from public comments received about the Round 2 draft MPA proposals are summarized in Briefing Document H.9 for the July 21-22, 2010 meeting of the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force Meeting.

Key Themes from Comments about Draft Recommended Special Closures

The majority of comments submitted regarding special closures in the MLPA North Coast Study Region were focused around a few specific geographies. The comments expressed concerns related to safety and access, and potential impacts to local economies. Additional comments expressed a redundancy in closing areas that already are protected by other regulations. Several participants expressed interest in implementing all ten draft recommended special closures.

Public Access and Safety Concerns. Many participants commented on the potential impact of special closures to navigational safety of commercial and recreational fishermen. The primary message was that special closures in the Trinidad area (Flatiron Rock and Green Rock special closures), which are adjacent to popular launch sites for charter boats, kayaks and rental boats, would have increased risk when accessing the water. Additional comments addressed how the limited access imposed by the special closures may confuse the public when they are attempting to access the area. Examples of the comments received include:

- “All of the rocks near Trinidad are already protected from human traffic by their monument status. To have a closure 300 ft. around Flatiron Rock could prove to be dangerous for boaters and kayakers. If anything is flushing birds off their nests it's the abundant sea lions. I thought that Little River rock was the rock listed in a study with human traffic. Why isn't that rock chosen to close?” (Comment #18)
- “Flat Iron Rock and Green Rock are very important to the charter bait fleet and as a Trinidad crab fisherman in the winter when its storming we cut just outside Flat Iron for safety and an exclusion zone would make us go deeper where it's a lot more hazardous. Please leave these zones alone!” (Comment #20)

- "...Further, the proposed closures around rocks in the Trinidad area and Reading Rock will create navigational safety issues. Additionally, the rocks are already protected by BLM and further designations are redundant. To avoid the negative economic consequences, navigational safety issues and redundancy my public input on the maps as follows: Eliminate the special closures in the Trinidad area: Flatiron and Green Rock..." (Comment #28)

Economic and Recreational Impacts. Many participants commented on the potential impacts that special closures would have on local economies. A major concern was that the special closures would impact local businesses, jobs and the number of tourists. The most commonly cited special closures related to these concerns were Green Rock and Flatiron Rock special closures. Some examples of the comments received include:

- "...Closing Flat Iron would cause of huge impact on tourism and local food sources for the people of Trinidad. Greek Rock Special Closure: Green Rock is a large fishery for charter boats, commercial fishing, and recreational fishing. Closing Green Rock would cause a huge impact on local food sources, tourism, jobs, and the economy of Trinidad and Humboldt County..." (Comment #32)
- "Flat Iron Rock and Green Rock closures would be extremely detrimental to our local fishermen who rely on them for not only their income but food too. Tourism in the Trinidad area would be severely impacted. Fishing brings so much money into our local economy sports fisherman spend money in our markets, hotels, bait shops, parks, restaurants...etc...This will depress our already struggling economy." (Comment # 33)
- "Steamboat rock closure is very bad for me. I have been fishing that spot since they have shut down the water over 120' deep..." (Comment #64)

Value of Special Closures for Conservation. Some participants indicated their support for some or all special closures as proposed, while at least one participant suggested modifying the draft recommended special closures to be seasonal for protection of birds and mammals during their breeding seasons only.

- "All Special Closure Areas on any proposal--Limit these closures to seasonal instead of year round. --I approve closures during bird & seal breeding seasons, but would like to be able to kayak these areas the remainder of the year." (Comment #30)
- "It seems that the special closure areas are at a minimum and all 10 should be retained." (Comment #38)
- "I like the special closures, all ten be adopted." (Comment #47)
- "We strongly encourage the Stakeholder Group to include all ten of the special closure sites in Round 3 and the preferred alternative. These ten comprise less than one-third of the important seabird colonies in the North Coast study area, as defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and would go far to safeguard the North Coast's magnificent marine bird life into the future." (Comment #82)