

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative
Draft Strategy for Public Participation in the MLPA North Coast Study Region
Draft revised November 17, 2009

The success of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative depends to a significant degree on incorporating meaningful public input into the work of the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force, Master Plan Science Advisory Team and North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group to help the State of California implement the MLPA.

This strategy identifies the various methods to be used to help ensure quality public participation in developing recommendations the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force will deliver to the California Fish and Game Commission for the MLPA North Coast Study Region.

Methods for public participation include:

- Attend meetings in person or via the MLPA Initiative website (live or archived),
- Provide public comment in person at meetings,
- Submit written comments via email, mail or fax,
- Participate in public open houses and workshops,
- Participate in public informational presentations directed to particular interest groups ,
- Become a member of the MLPA North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCRSG),
- Communicate directly with a NCRSG member that represents your interests,
- Become a member of the MLPA Statewide Interests Group (SIG),
- Develop an external proposed marine protected area (MPA) array (“external array”),
- Assist with joint fact-finding, and
- Become a key communicator.

Outreach and educational tools include:

- MLPA Initiative website www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa
- Print materials
- Internet-based technologies
- Public meetings, workshops and open houses
- Informational meetings with key interest groups
- Study tours and field trips
- MLPA North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group
- MLPA Statewide Interests Group
- Key communicators network
- Utilizing existing community resources
- Joint fact-finding

General Background

Creating a collaborative, mutually beneficial relationship with the public¹ is essential to the success of any project, including the MLPA Initiative. As intended by this legislation, the structure of the MLPA Initiative provides for local communities to share relevant knowledge, information and suggestions on statewide and regional proposals, including firsthand observations, socioeconomic information, and suggestions for monitoring, evaluation and stewardship of MPAs. Collaborative relationships can increase stability in a complex environment and expand the capacity for successful implementation under changing circumstances. Collaboration with the public offers the opportunity to:

- deepen mutual understanding about the issues at hand;
- explore and integrate ideas together;
- generate new options and solutions that may not have been considered individually;
- identify and resolve areas of conflict; and
- ensure the long-term availability of resources to achieve mutual goals.

In recognition of these benefits, the focus of this strategy is on building a robust network of positive, mutually-reinforcing relationships and effective public involvement. This network will help ensure the success of the MLPA Initiative, and also create an evolving structure within which the long-term goal of creating a cohesive network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in California can be achieved.

This strategy builds upon the lessons learned through the first three MLPA Initiative study regions in 2004-2009 and incorporates recommendations made during public workshops held in the north coast study region in July 2009.

Adaptations to Better Suit the North Coast Community

To fully integrate the robust local knowledge available within MLPA North Coast Study Region, a number of adaptations have been made to the north coast MPA planning process:

1. Community groups and/or individuals will develop external MPA arrays as the first round of MPA proposal development. This revised approach allows north coast community members to build a foundation from which the NCRSG can work to develop MPA proposals. Additional outreach events, materials and resources will be developed to support these community efforts.

¹ In recognition of the strong connection members of the north coast community have with natural resources, it is important to recognize that many, if not all, members of the public identify themselves as “stakeholders.” To avoid confusion with the term “regional stakeholder group” and for the purposes of this document, affected parties, including commercial and recreational fishing interests, non-consumptive recreational users, conservationists, government agencies, scientists and others, will be referred to as the “public.” However this term is not to diminish the “stakeholder” role the north coast community plays in marine resource access, use and management.

2. Recognizing limitations that exist in the north coast study region regarding the public's access to the Internet, computers, and, at times, phone lines, outreach materials will be made available in a variety of physical and virtual locations. Whenever possible, video recordings of meetings, workshops and public presentations as well as copies of handouts and support materials will be made available on the MLPA Initiative website. Copies of these videos and materials will also be distributed to local community centers, such as libraries, California Department of Fish and Game offices, chambers of commerce, community centers, etc.

Methods for Public Participation

Public participation is vital to the successful implementation of the MLPA. As outlined in a memorandum of understanding among the MLPA Initiative partners – the California Natural Resources Agency, California Department of Fish and Game and the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation – all blue ribbon task force, science advisory team and regional stakeholder group publicly noticed meetings will be transparent and open to the public.

Key opportunities for public participation include the following:

Public Meetings

All scheduled meetings of the blue ribbon task force, science advisory team and regional stakeholder group will be noticed in advance and open to the public; whenever possible, these meetings will also be simultaneously webcast and archived for later viewing. Meeting agendas and supporting materials will be available for public review, distributed via standard message dissemination techniques such as the Internet, email, list servers, print mailings and other methods on special request. Depending on the technology used, video and/or audio recordings will also be available.

Verbal Public Comment

The agenda of each blue ribbon task force and science advisory team meeting will include the opportunity for public comments on actions to be taken, as well as a general public comment period for any subject related to that body. Each regional stakeholder group general meeting will include a public comment period for subjects related to the work of the regional stakeholder group.

Similar to past study regions, a "Guide to Providing Effective Public Comment" will be developed for each general meeting. This document provides details on the format and timing of the public comment period.

Written Public Comment

The public may submit formal written comments to the MLPA Initiative at any MLPA meeting or via email, mail or fax. The public can provide general or specific comments on key issues or documents being considered for adoption. The blue ribbon task force, science advisory team

and regional stakeholder group will consider public comments and questions while developing final versions of key documents and MPA proposal development. These comments will be distributed to the appropriate body for review.

Public Open Houses

Public open houses were held in July 2009, prior to the start of the north coast MPA planning process. A series of open houses will be held again midway through the MPA planning process following the development of Round 2 draft MPA proposals. The purpose of these events is to offer opportunities for the public to provide feedback at various stages of the process, including input on marine resources uses, access, geographic areas and MPA proposals being considered.

Public Workshops

A series of informational workshops will be conducted during the initial months of the north coast process to support the development of external arrays. To ensure external arrays adhere to specific methods and guidelines as developed by the science advisory team, blue ribbon task force, California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and MLPA Initiative staff, these workshops will:

- Offer basic information about the MLPA and MLPA Initiative
- Provide details on science advisory team guidelines, DFG and State Parks feasibility analysis
- Introduce key documents (i.e. regional profile)
- Offer MarineMap training
- Provide details regarding the development and components of MPA proposals, including the distribution of a “Guide to Developing External Proposed MPA Arrays”.

Work Sessions

Work sessions include subsets, or “work groups,” of the full regional stakeholder group membership and are an opportunity to apply information shared during meetings. Often work sessions focus on developing MPA concepts and arrays, but may also cover special topics (such as specific goals and objectives). No formal decisions are made during work sessions and they are not webcast or videotaped. While members of the public are welcome to observe work sessions, there is no public comment period.

Informational Presentations

Presentations to targeted interest groups or at-public events are a useful way to disseminate information and educate the public. Presentations will be given throughout the process to help ensure that members of the public are informed of the process and how they can become involved.

Regional Stakeholder Group

This group will include approximately 20-25 individuals from the study region who provide a range of perspectives, knowledge and skills that will be valuable in developing alternative proposals for MPAs in the study region. The director of DFG and the chair of the blue ribbon task force will solicit nominations and jointly select from the nominees a group whose members represent the broadest possible stakeholder interests and are capable of working together to successfully complete the project. The group will meet regularly, most often in person, for approximately one year to develop alternative MPA proposals for the study region. The types of representatives selected may include educators, resource managers, extractive users, non-extractive users, scientists, conservation interests, members of the general public and enforcement personnel, among others. Members of the public are encouraged to work through NCRSG members who represent their interests to provide direct input to the planning process.

External Proposed MPA Arrays from Community Groups

To fully integrate the robust local knowledge available within MLPA North Coast Study Region, community groups and/or individuals are invited to develop external MPA arrays as the first round of MPA proposal development. This revised approach allows north coast community members to build a foundation from which the NCRSG can work from to develop MPA proposals.

Similar to past study regions, complete external MPA arrays that include broad geographic coverage and outline details of MPAs, including specific boundaries and proposed regulations, will be forwarded by MLPA Initiative for SAT, DFG, State Parks and MLPA Initiative staff evaluation, as well as review by the BRTF. These external proposed MPA arrays along with their evaluation results will be presented to the regional stakeholder group for consideration in MPA planning. Those involved in developing external MPA arrays are encouraged to attend MLPA workshops and MarineMap trainings, review the *Guide to Developing External Proposed MPA Arrays* document and other support materials, and connect with MLPA Initiative staff for ongoing support.

A new page “Guide to Developing External MPA Arrays” has been created on the MLPA Initiative website (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/guide.asp>). This page provides resources to community groups developing external MPA arrays.

Joint Fact-Finding

Unlike the traditional coastal management process, joint fact-finding begins with collaboratively developing a common knowledge base.

Members of the regional stakeholder group and the broader public are encouraged to contribute their knowledge to the MLPA Initiative process, in conjunction with members of the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory team. There are several opportunities to provide this input. One of the best opportunities is in the review of the North Coast Regional Profile, which will be drafted by MLPA Initiative staff and distributed to the public for comment and review.

Stakeholder knowledge and input will be incorporated as appropriate throughout the document. Additional opportunities for joint-fact finding will be provided through presentations by experts in the study region. In past study regions, scientists and other knowledgeable individuals were invited to give presentations, followed by opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions and contribute additional knowledge.

Key Communicators Network

A network of “key communicators” will be used to help disseminate outreach and educational materials in the north coast study region. Key communicators consist of members of the community who help disseminate MLPA Initiative information through their pre-existing communication channels, greatly enhancing the reach of MLPA Initiative outreach materials.

Outreach and Education Tools

Building off materials developed in previous study regions, a variety of new and traditional outreach and education tools will be implemented to help facilitate effective public education and involvement in the north coast study region.

The following outreach tools will be applied to the north coast study region:

Print Materials

Printed materials are an invaluable tool to help educate and stimulate the public to become involved in the process. A series of handouts have been created and a tri-fold brochure will be developed to explain and introduce the MLPA, MLPA Initiative, and study region process to community members. Assistance from north coast key communicators, regional stakeholder group members, volunteers and interns will be used to distribute these materials. These materials will also be posted to the MLPA website and distributed to local community centers, such as libraries, so that they may be used by an organization or individual at any time.

Additional documents have been developed to support the developing of external proposed MPA arrays from community groups:

- *Guide to Developing External Proposed MPA Arrays webpage* - To accommodate the needs of community groups and/or individuals developing external arrays, a new webpage (www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/guide.asp) has been created. This new page will include access to key documents, presentations and materials required for developing external arrays. This page will also include the *Guide to Developing External Proposed MPA Arrays* as a downloadable package.

Internet-based Technologies

The MLPA website, www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa, includes functions such as a listserv and the simultaneous webcast of meetings. These functions will continue to be implemented to the extent that the manageability and cost of these technologies is not prohibitive.

Several additional web technologies will be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of outreach and education activities:

1. *E-newsletter* – A periodic e-newsletter specific to the MLPA North Coast Study Region will be developed for distribution to the MLPA listserv. The newsletter will summarize all MLPA Initiative public meetings and events during a specified time period and list all upcoming MLPA Initiative meetings and events in a succinct document.
2. *MarineMap* – Stakeholders and other members of the public have the ability to view MPA proposals as they are developed using an online decision support system called MarineMap. Using this tool, specifics of MPA proposals can be viewed, including boundaries, proposed regulations, goals of proposed MPAs, etc. One may also view background data layers, in order to better understand the reasoning behind placing MPAs in specific locations. MarineMap is also the primary means for submitting an external proposal to the MLPA Initiative process.
3. *Informational Videos* – An “Introduction to the MLPA” video has been created to provide the public with basic information about the MLPA, the MLPA Initiative and the north coast planning process. Additional videos taken of public presentations, including information regarding MPA proposal development, evaluation criteria and an introduction to MarineMap will also be developed. Videos will be available online, in CD format and will also be made available to key communicators and distributed to community centers (i.e. community centers, libraries, DFG offices, chambers of commerce, etc.)

Study Tours and Field Trips

In a study tour/field trip, a group of blue ribbon task force members, MLPA Initiative staff and/or MLPA regional stakeholder group members gather at relevant sites to learn more about issues related to a network of MPAs or to visit a place where MPAs already exist. Study tours/field trips are designed to strengthen lines of communication between the blue ribbon task force and stakeholders and/or to introduce blue ribbon force members to others who have already worked their way through similar questions in a different geographic location. To the extent possible, north coast study tours/field trips will be held in conjunction with blue ribbon task force meetings and at additional times when at least two blue ribbon task force members are able to participate.

MLPA Statewide Interests Group

This group will include representatives of key constituent groups throughout the state. It serves as an additional mechanism for two-way communication between the blue ribbon task force and stakeholders about the approach and activities of the MLPA Initiative and about policy issues of statewide concern relevant to the MLPA Initiative. This group will meet via facilitated conference call and will be convened by the chair of the blue ribbon task force or the executive director of the MLPA Initiative as necessary or desired, but generally about ten days after each blue ribbon task force meeting. The group will provide feedback on the previous task force meeting, respond to specific questions posed by the chair or executive director, and recommend panel speakers and subject matter for upcoming task force meetings.