RRR

The external proposal RRR generated by the Santa Barbara Channelkeeper and the Santa Monica Baykeeper intends to delineate a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) throughout the South Coast Study Region consistent with the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), in particular those that prioritize the conservation and restoration of our marine life, habitats and ecosystem function. The design of this network is founded on the scientific principles of ecology, biological and physical oceanography, conservation biology, biogeography and natural reserve design.

As such, the location, size and spacing of the MPAs in this proposal are driven by the availability and type(s) of habitats and biological resources resident within these areas. The relative quality of the existing habitats and biological communities was applied to site selection and central to the spacing and sizing determinations. Priority was given to locations containing relatively robust key habitat and corresponding attributes such as stable biogenic structure, high relief substrates, and upwelling zones. The MPAs proposed in this network were selected for these characteristics and the highest priority was given to MPAs that encompass as many of these features while considering the other goals of the MLPA Initiative. Furthermore, we take seriously the guidance provided by a growing body of scientific evidence on the effectiveness of marine protected areas around the globe. Specifically, that the greatest biological benefits are realized from the highest level of protection afforded by no-take marine reserves and that larger MPAs contain the home ranges of a greater number of individuals of a population than smaller MPAs. In addition, strategically sited large MPAs have the additional benefit of including a higher variety of habitat types, better encompassing entire life stages and critical, across functional group, species interactions. Resultantly, the living resources of our coast are far likely to respond more rapidly to the protections provided by a network of large highly protective MPAs; leading to a relatively quick much needed restoration of ecosystem structure and function.

The MLPA Initiative Science Advisory Team (SAT) has directed alternative MPA network proposals to recognize that the biological communities of the south coast are distinctly different and represented by five delineated yet interconnected bioregions, within which sufficient habitat representation and repetition need to be considered in MPA network design. Accordingly, protections of resources at the bioregion scale are requisite of a successful network in the south coast. Thus strong consideration was given to create a network that functioned within these bioregions, and throughout the south coast study region. We reduced the spacing when necessary to accommodate the replication of habitat types within bioregions.

Throughout the designation of our MPA network, while meeting the goals of the MLPA, we gave serious consideration socioeconomic values and impacts as recommended by the Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF). Whenever possible we mitigated for short-term socioeconomic concerns. However, sound socioeconomic policy for any natural resource planner requires long-term sustainability and ecological resilience of the resource(s) take precedent. This tenet is the principle rationale for the socioeconomic considerations manifest in this proposal. The measured opinion of the authors represented here is that the South Coast is in need of the protections provided by the MLPA; a network of MPAs designed to achieve the goals of the Act will support not detract from the diverse interests and industries of our coastal economy.

Consistent with the goals of the MLPA, we looked to support or cultivate recreational, educational, study, efficient management, and enforcement opportunities in our proposed MPAs. Preference was given to areas with existing educational programs, ongoing research and in-place mechanisms of enforceability. To promote

recreational use of MPAs, public access, proximity to harbors and areas compatible with and/or reliant on tourism including land-based state or local parks and beaches were given priority.

While the MLPA Initiative's scientific guidelines are not specific in relation to the level of protection and spacing of MPAs encompassing the waters of our offshore islands and tidally-influenced estuarine environments, we took seriously their uniqueness and the great importance these areas play in the overall protection of California's marine resources and ecosystem function. The critical ecological roles wetland environments play in marine ecosystem function are well understood. Greater than ninety percent of southern California's coastal wetlands have been lost or compromised by development and other habitat modifications. This unavoidable truth demands that we make every effort to protect and restore the few estuaries that still exist today. To this end, we have designated many of the most ecologically important and intact estuaries in the South Coast Region with the highest level of protection as State Marine Reserves (SMRs). The ecological significance of the marine life and habitats that exist at our offshore islands and the fact that much of these communities are still relatively robust also warrants large MPAs with the highest level of protection in these areas. Furthermore, the recognition that islands group as distinctly different bioregions suggests that their unique community compositions are a result of being relatively isolated and self contained environments, emphasizing the need to comprehensively replicate habitat types within island waters. In addition, islands characteristically show significant differences in community composition on leeward versus windward sides of islands, driven by primarily geographical and oceanographic differences, warranting distinct MPA placement and replication to account for these differences.

Finally, as directed by the MLPA, existing state marine resource management efforts should be considered when designing an effective MPA network and existing MPAs should be evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting the goals of the MLPA and subsequently modified, allowed to remain or removed depending on their ability to do so. In most cases, existing MPAs were geographically located in areas where they were incorporated into MPA designations that encompassed more area and/or afforded a higher level of protection under the new MPA designation. For one MPA that did not fall under this scenario but whose regulatory protection level, size, spacing, and habitat representation met the goals of the MLPA and the guidelines of the SAT and BRTF, we kept the MPA as was originally designated. In all other cases, the existing MPAs were removed. In addition, other state marine resource management efforts, such as Areas of Special Biological Significance, were taken into consideration as means to enhance the effectiveness of an MPA or rationale for MPA placement.

The end result of our deliberations, and outreach is proposal RRR, a MPA network design that we feel meets the explicit goals of the MLPA to protect, conserve and restore California's marine life, habitats, natural heritage and ecosystem function. Our network is founded in the paramount priority that it is effective at meeting these goals and promises long-term benefits to Californians and the restoration and sustainability of our marine resources. To meet this obligation, we have followed the guidelines of the SAT, the BRTF, the Department of Fish and Game and the MLPA Initiative staff, in concert with a more comprehensive attention to the scientific principles of natural reserve design that identify the prioritizing criteria stated above. Our network consists of 47 MPAs of which 41 are designated SMRs, 3 are State Marine Parks (SMPs) and 3 are State Marine Conservation Areas (SMCAs). Ten of the 41 SMRs are estuaries, lagoons, salt marshes, or bays with San Diego Bay designated as an SMP. In this proposal 32.7% of the South Coast Study Region total area is designated as MPAs, with 30.6% as SMRs, 1.2% as SMPs, and 0.9% as SMCAs.