

**California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative:
Draft Criteria for Selecting the Central Coast Project Area**

The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) requires the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to design a draft proposal for alternative marine protected area (MPA) networks to be adopted by the Fish and Game Commission. The MLPA Initiative will begin this process in an area along the central coast under the guidance of the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force. The Central Coast MLPA Project will produce a suite of alternative MPA networks according to the MLPA requirements and draft Master Plan Framework, in a regional project that incorporates sound science, stakeholder input, and general public participation.

In order to begin the Central Coast MLPA Project, the project area along the central coast must be selected. The broadest definition of the greater central coast area spans from Pt. Arena south to Pt. Conception. In the previous MLPA process efforts, three regional working groups were formed within this geographical area. In determining where specifically to locate and how large an area to select for the Central Coast MLPA Project, the following criteria should be used in order to achieve the six goals identified in Section 2853(b) of the MLPA:

- **Biophysical boundaries.** Species of plants and animals are not distributed continuously along the California coast. Rather, they have distinct north/south boundaries. Many species form natural communities with borders that may assist in determining the central coast project area. Although the borders themselves may be fuzzy, the central coast clearly has two major zones, divided by the outflow from San Francisco Bay. A weaker, but important break occurs at Point Sur, where current gyres cause abrupt changes in the composition of the community of species.
- **Human activity boundaries.** The diversity and intensity of human activities in coastal waters also are discontinuous. As an example, recreational fishing is more prevalent south of Point Conception than north. The waters around Monterey are among the most popular sites for scuba diving in the United States. Government jurisdictions add another layer of complexity that should be considered.
- **Progress of past DFG and other public discussion groups.** This includes the three previous MLPA regional working groups, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Marine Protected Area Working Group, the Marine Interest Group in Morro Bay, and others. Input from these groups' prior discussions should be considered.
- **Potential state, federal and private partners with financial or in-kind services.** This includes NOAA's MPA Science Center in Santa Cruz and the Monterey Bay, Gulf of the Farallones, and Cordell Bank national marine sanctuaries, as well as the California Department of Parks and Recreation and others. Availability of services within specific areas should be considered.
- **Scientific knowledge of, and research being conducted in, the area.** Public and private entities, such as universities, state and federal agencies, and power generating companies (e.g.

PG&E's Diablo Canyon) have conducted or are conducting research and monitoring studies in the greater central coast area. Area specific information availability, including information on the distribution of habitats identified in the MLPA, should help determine the final project area.

- **Availability of first-hand knowledge of the area.** Numerous scientists, fishermen, and other informed individuals collectively provide a wealth of knowledge within the greater central coast area. The level and availability of this type of information should be considered.
- **Availability of scientific data on existing MPAs and how they meet or do not meet both resource protection needs and the requirements of the MLPA.** Within the greater central coast area there are 21 MPAs in ocean waters as well as numerous estuarine MPAs. The amount and type of information available for these existing areas should be taken into account.
- **Existing fishery regulations in the area and how they meet or do not meet both resource protection needs and the requirements of the MLPA.** The greater central coast area spans several fishery management zones established by DFG, as well as nine DFG districts (three within the San Francisco Bay estuarine complex). Each of these zones and districts has a unique set of fishery regulations. These existing regulations create differences in the need for additional protection in certain areas.
- **Range or area over which resources are utilized by user groups.** Within the greater central coast area, certain fisheries are more localized and port-based, while others draw users from a wide range of the state as well as out-of-state. The selected project area should reflect a consideration of these and other users.
- **Range or area over which a resource user may be expected to have a working knowledge of the resources.** Similar to the above, the geographic range of a user's working knowledge will vary with the resource or resources in question. This also applies to researchers, fishery managers, and other scientists within the region. The selected project area should not be so large as to preclude the ability of individual representatives to provide input on the entire project area.
- **Distance members of a regional stakeholder group would need to travel in order to participate in group meetings.** The greater central coast area spans roughly 275 nautical miles from north to south. Choosing too large an area for the central coast project could impose logistical problems for those required to, or interested in, participating in the process.
- **Availability of DFG personnel.** DFG has limited staff working in the four Marine Region offices within the greater central coast (Bodega Bay, Belmont, Monterey, Morro Bay). The same considerations relative to travel which apply to the regional working group would also apply to DFG staff.