

July 29, 2005

Pat McDonnell, Editor  
Western Outdoor News  
185 Avenida La Pata  
San Clemente, CA 92673

Sent via email to Pat@wonews.com

Dear Mr. McDonnell,

We write on behalf of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative's Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (CCRSG). The CCRSG is a group of 32 stakeholders and 23 alternates appointed by the chair of the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force and director of the California Department of Fish and Game to represent a broad range of fishing, conservation, research, and other marine interests in the area between Point Conception and Pigeon Point. A team consisting of regional stakeholders and MLPA Initiative staff prepared this letter.

We would like to clarify a reference to the MLPA Initiative Central Coast Project that appeared in a June 24, 2005 editorial of Western Outdoor News. The editorial stated that during the CCRSG's June meeting, the Department of Fish and Game and project facilitators "tried to impose a gag order on participants that would have prevented them from talking to the press."

In fact, the final ground rule on media contact adopted on June 9 states that:

"CCRSG members recognize the need to maintain a balance between providing timely information to constituents and making statements to the media that could undermine the success of the MLPA process. Appropriate topics for CCRSG members to address in speaking to the media include their own group's interests or where the CCRSG is in the MLPA process. CCRSG members agree to avoid: a) making statements to constituents or the media that may prejudice the project's outcome, b) speaking on behalf of another group's point of view or characterizing their motives, or c) stating positions on preliminary proposals while they are still in development or refinement by the CCRSG."

Thus, this ground rule unanimously adopted by the CCRSG explicitly acknowledges the potential need for stakeholder representatives to communicate with the media, and permits such communication.

We think it is useful to consider how the ground rules were written. In preparing to launch the CCRSG, project facilitators conducted a series of interviews with group members. They specifically asked group members to suggest ground rules that could help the process work effectively. Many CCRSG members expressed concerns about the potential of premature media contact to undermine progress. Many members advised that adopting a rule limiting media contact early on would be important to maintain the focused development of proposals, avoid the prejudging of outcomes, and discourage debate of preliminary concepts and proposals in the media rather than at CCRSG meetings. Accordingly, the draft ground rules were quite restrictive on this topic, and asked members to avoid speaking to the media until the process had completed its work.

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As the conversation proceeded at the June CCRSG meeting, stakeholders from a variety of interest groups (including recreational fishing stakeholders) commented that an overly restrictive ground rule on contact between CCRSG members and the media would make it difficult for them to communicate effectively with their constituents.

We see the resulting final ground rules as balanced and reasonable. They recognize the need to maintain a balance between providing timely information to constituents and making statements to the media that do not characterize the views of others nor prejudge work in progress. The full set of ground rules can be found on the MLPA Initiative website at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/centralcoast.html> attached to the June 8-9 CCRSG meeting agenda.

We appreciate that Western Outdoor News is taking an interest in the CCRSG's work. We encourage that you focus on the outcomes of the CCRSG's deliberations. You may also want to contact individual members of the CCRSG as the work proceeds.

Regards,

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Central Coast Project Manager

Howard Egan  
Recreational Fishing Alliance

Marla Morrissey  
Marine Interest Group of San Luis Obispo County

Scott McCreary and Eric Poncelet  
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Steve Webster  
Educator

cc: Chair Phil Isenberg, MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force  
Director Ryan Brodrick, Department of Fish and Game  
Rich Holland, Western Outdoor News