

**Central Coast Marine Protected Areas
Project**

**Environmental Impact Report
Summary of Public Scoping Comments**

Prepared for:

California Department of Fish and Game
20 Lower Ragsdale Drive, Suite 100
Monterey, CA 93940
Contact: John Ugoretz

Prepared by:

Jones & Stokes
268 Grand Avenue
Oakland, CA 94610-4724
Contact: Jeff Thomas
510/433-8962

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NOP
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Meeting Announcement Flyer
Meeting Flyer Distribution List
Meeting Presentation
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Introduction

On behalf of the California Fish and Game Commission, the California Department of Fish and Game (Department) will be preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Central Coast Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Project (project). Pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Department released a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on July 11, 2006 and held two scoping meetings: one on Thursday, August 10, 2006 in Morro Bay and one on Friday, August 11, 2006 in Monterey. The scoping meetings were held at the Morro Bay Veteran's Memorial Building at 209 Surf Street and the Monterey Beach Resort, La Grande Room, at 2600 Sand Dunes Drive. Approximately 38 people attended the Morro Bay meeting and 15 people attended the Monterey meeting. The purpose of the scoping meetings was to present a project description and receive oral comment regarding the scope of the EIR for the project. Written comments were received by the Department between July 17, 2006 and August 18, 2006. This report summarizes the key subjects raised in both oral comment at the scoping meetings and written comments concerning the scope of the EIR.

Project Description

The project proposes a network of MPAs within the central coast region of California, as required by the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). For the purpose of the project, the central coast region defined as State waters located between Pigeon Point (San Mateo County) and Point Conception (Santa Barbara County).

The goals of the project are:

- To protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function, and integrity of marine ecosystems.
- To help sustain, conserve, and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.
- To improve recreational, educational, and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbance, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.
- To protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in California waters for their intrinsic value.
- To ensure that California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures, and adequate enforcement, and are based on sound scientific guidelines.
- To ensure that the state's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a network.

Currently, the central coast region has twelve existing MPAs and one special closure area. The proposed project would modify and/or delete these MPAs and establish new MPAs to achieve the project goals.

Throughout the Environmental Scoping Phase of the project, input was sought from the public and regulatory agencies to assist in identifying a range of alternatives, potentially significant environmental effects and possible mitigation measures.

Scoping Process

The project will require approval from the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), a state agency, before implementation. Discretionary actions by state and local agencies are subject to review under CEQA. The purpose of review under CEQA is to inform governmental decision-makers and the public about potentially significant environmental effects of proposed projects and possible ways to avoid or substantially reduce those impacts. All agencies are required to conduct an environmental review under CEQA prior to approval of a project.

For the Central Coast MPAs project, scoping was conducted to assist the Commission, which is the CEQA lead agency, in identifying the range of alternatives, potentially significant environmental effects, and possible mitigation measures. Scoping is a process whereby the lead agency seeks input from other agencies and the public early in the environmental review process.

Noticing and Publicity

The NOP was distributed to the State Clearinghouse and mailed to governmental agencies with potential interest, expertise, and/or authority over the project. The NOP also was sent to the MLPA Initiative public mailing and email lists. The notification process included a MLPA web posting announcing the meeting dates, locations and times, meeting flyers, mailing of the meeting flyer, and a newspaper advertisement. Notification materials and the NOP are included in the Appendix.

Summary of Verbal & Written Comments

The following summarizes verbal comments received at the scoping meetings and written comments received from regulatory agencies and the public during the scoping comment period. Comments in their entirety are located in the Appendix. This is not intended as a verbatim or comprehensive list of issues raised in comment, but rather to summarize notable concerns. For the detailed concerns, the reader is directed to the comments themselves.

Air Quality

- Would there be air pollution resulting from longer running times?

Biological Resources

- **Displacement of Fishing Effort** – Displacement and concentration of fishing in lower-productivity areas will result in loss of fisheries outside of MPAs.
- Assess impact of pinnipeds on fish populations.
- Assess harvest of apex predators on fish populations.
- Assess marine ecosystem as total biological community.
- Assess breeding patterns and dietary preferences of birds and mammals. How will populations of birds and mammals change with the proposed MPAs?
- Collection of fishing data is as important as collection of biological data.
- Discuss benefits of MPAs.

- Concern raised about reef use impacts resulting from fishing congestion outside MPAs.

Consumptive Uses

- **Commercial and Recreational Fishing** – Concern regarding loss of opportunities within central coast study area. Lost opportunities should be mitigated.
- **Management** – Consider adverse and beneficial effects on federally managed fisheries and fish stocks.
- **Socioeconomics** – Consider effects on fishing industries and communities. Opposition expressed to closures or restrictions that hinder local seafood business economy.
- Reduction in by-catch a poor indicator of species depletion.
- Consider effect of increased fish imports from other countries.
- Ecotrust data and surveys were used against the fishing industry.

Non-Consumptive Uses

- Recreation user base extends beyond central California coast.
- Public recreational elements must be evaluated relative to impacts on neighboring private lands.
- Discuss benefits of MPAs to non-consumptive users.
- Protected areas don't represent best non-consumptive use interests – too much sandy bottom lacking habitat diversity.

Cultural Resources

- EIR should assess fishing heritage as a coastal cultural resource.

Enforcement

- The Department can't adequately enforce existing regulations. Can the Department provide adequate enforcement both inside and outside of MPAs?
- Include analysis of ability to monitor and enforce project, particularly adjacent to Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Funding

- Cost not given enough consideration.
- Initial funding may be available, but what of the balance needed for future management?
- Consider joint state-federal task group and cooperative monitoring with cost sharing.
- EIR should delineate all funding required to implement and manage the project.

MPA Design

- Prohibition of all extractive activities within State Marine Reserves conflicts with other management activities such as invasive species control and removal of rotting carcasses.
- MPAs in other parts of the world (Florida, Australia) are not similar to or comparable with those in California.
- Effects of MPAs should be able to be understood from the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary monitoring efforts. Establishment of decent biological baselines is needed.
- MPAs will not build or maintain fish stocks.

- Discrepancy exists between MPA goals and regulations proposed to achieve them.
- SAT did not quantify expected outcomes. An abundance assessment and population dynamics modeling should be completed in support of the EIR analysis.
- Avoid using concepts from terrestrial protected area planning.
- SAT should develop quantitative classification guidelines and a quantitative assessment of degree of benefit by species.
- Consider phasing of MPA network and developing benchmarks for expansion.
- Assess implications of semi-take areas versus no-take areas.
- Assess ability of alternatives to facilitate monitoring and adaptive management.
- MPAs can work if modeled correctly. Quotas work better.
- Ecosystem function and diversity are not well defined.

Land Use

- Compare proposed regulations with past regulations and closures, and other State laws. Assess effectiveness of past regulations on marine resources.
- Assess change in land use plans for coastal communities dependent on coastal access, recreation and commercial fishing activities.

Population and Housing

- Loss of homes anticipated. Need to consider changes in standard of living to fishermen.

Public Services

- Consider effects on ports, marina, and harbors such as oil and fuel spills, and vessel abandonment.

Water Quality

- Number of MPAs could be reduced if non-point source pollution addressed.

Vessel Traffic

- Consider safety of vessels traveling further and effect of higher densities of vessels.
- Consider safety issue of vessels dodging MPAs to fish.
- Vessel traffic effects may be balanced between distances traveled by fishermen and divers.

CEQA Process

- Confusion expressed as to whether an equivalent environmental document or an environmental impact report (EIR) is being prepared. Need for preparation of an EIR identified.
- Consultant should consider best available science and earlier analyses.
- Include assessment of cumulative effects and reasonably foreseeable future project phases.
- CEQA analysis must include a detailed description of non-fishing impacts to the marine ecosystem, and how the MPA network will improve or worsen these impacts.

- Scoping inappropriate at this time because Commission has not selected a preferred package. Scoping deadline needs to be extended. Website didn't mention scoping meetings.

Alternatives

- **General** – All additional or enlarged State Marine Reserves, or Marine Life Reserves, should be eliminated. Should look to improving water quality, sewage treatment, and control of trawling in lieu of MPAs.
- Include no action analysis and discussion.
- Include Package 1 in CEQA analysis.
- Include Package 2R in CEQA analysis.
- Include Science Advisory Team analysis in alternatives environmental review. Also include analysis of how each alternative meets legal requirements of MLPA.
- Differences among alternatives expected to be few.
- **Subregion 7** – Consider allowance of white sea bass gill net fishing to offset MPA impacts.

Other Considerations

- Citizens' rights violated by not putting project on ballot. Conflict with special interest groups.
- Are MPA's required?
- Begin monitoring basic ecological response indicators.
- NEPA document required based on federal agency involvement in implementation process.
- Assess educational benefits of MPAs.