

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

Summary of Key Themes from Public Workshops for the North Central Coast Project

Revised February 20, 2008

On February 4, 5 and 6, 2008, the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative hosted a series of public workshops focused on the topic of the MLPA North Central Coast Project. The three workshops were held during the evenings from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. in Petaluma, Gualala and Pacifica, respectively.

The primary objectives of the workshops were to:

1. brief members of the public on the status of the MLPA Initiative North Central Coast Project,
2. outline the content of draft marine protected area (MPA) proposals being evaluated at that time, and
3. invite questions and comments from members of the public.

The workshops involved a mix of plenary and small group formats. As part of the workshop effort, written comments were gathered on the overall MLPA initiative, individual draft MPA proposals, specific MPA candidate sites, and key issues. A total of 135 written comments were received.

This document provides an overview of the major themes that emerged from the public input; this is not a complete list of all the ideas contributed by the public but, instead, a summary of key ideas that recurred throughout the three workshops. This summary, along with an attached table that compiles all the written comments received at the workshops, is being provided to the MLPA North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group to inform ongoing revisions of draft MPA proposals.

Key Themes from the February 4-6, 2008 MLPA Initiative Public Workshops

1. **Cross proposal thinking.** In general, workshop participants focused their comments on individual MPAs or individual subregions. For instance, one participant liked how one draft MPA proposal designed MPAs in the Point Arena area, another proposal's Salt Point MPA configuration, and yet preferred a different proposal's design for an MPA complex at Bodega Head. This suggests that the public was not attached to one specific draft MPA proposal and was instead interested in the assemblage of ideas drawn from all proposals.
2. **Access and safety.** Concerns about public access and safety were one of the major issues raised during the workshops. Concerns were raised about access for kayakers, shore-based fishermen and abalone divers, in particular. Commonly identified areas of high importance included Salt Point, Gerstle Cove, and Fish Mill. Example comments include:
 - a. "We are divers... [and] enjoy recreational sport activities that include breath-hold spearfishing, abalone/sea urchin/scallop diving, as well as kayak... There are very few readily accessible areas that allow for boat and kayak launching. There are five: Ross, Timber Cove, Stillwater Cove, Ocean Cove and Gerstle Cove. By taking away the Gerstle Cove entry a significant portion of the coast will prevent kayak access to areas south... With access limited via Ocean Cove, an additional 2 miles of kayaking is necessary to reach the current launching area at Gerstle Cove. Very few are capable of paddling this distance..." (Comment #24)
 - b. "As a recreational fisherman and abalone diver, proposal 4 closes off access to dive spots that provide a safe & sheltered entry when dive conditions may be dangerous elsewhere. Specifically, Fish Mill is sheltered from Northern swells making it safe. By closing this area, you will be forcing divers to take some unnecessary risks by going into areas... shutting off Fish Mill may cause more accidents." (Comment #173)

- 3. Proposed regulations.** Many members of the public commented on the proposed regulations for particular MPAs. Support or opposition for proposed regulations varied, depending on the interest or group the individual represented. In particular, a number of people expressed concern about state marine recreational management areas (SMRMAs) being proposed in estuaries, such as Tomales Bay, and how they may restrict waterfowl hunting in those areas. Example comments include:

 - a. “[For Draft Proposal 4] Tomales Bay State Marine Reserve there is motion of phasing out Duck hunting with a separate regulation process? Is the State proposing this or the drafters of the proposal? (Comment #159)
 - b. “In any proposal where crab fishing is proposed, I'd like to see prawn take included as well. For example in Bodega Bay, should consider allowing prawn fishing where crab is proposed to be allowed.” (Comment #27)
- 4. Economic impacts.** There was also a great deal of concern about potential economic impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as local communities. Example comments include:

 - a. “Current proposals will threaten this fragile community fishing... Pt. Reyes (chimney rock and south beach) to the first rocks is vital to the halibut fishermen in the area. Halibut is a low bicatch - high economic importance fish, critical to the survival of local communities.” (Comment #65)
 - b. “I see JC [Proposal 4] and EC [Proposal 1] have large SMR'S near Black Point and encompassing all state waters. This is some of this regions most productive crab grounds and will create a socioeconomic hardship on the local fishing ports, namely Bodega Bay.” (Comment #56)
- 5. Marine mammals and birds.** Another topic heard throughout the workshops was interest in protecting marine mammals and birds. Some members of the public identified important areas for these mammals and birds and suggested how the draft MPA proposals could incorporate these considerations. Example comments include:

 - a. “San Pedro Rock and Devil's Slide Rock including mainland: Special closure zone needed to protect seabird nesting colonies. Recommend 1,000 ft. No-Transit Zone to be incorporated in this area.” (Comment #19)
 - b. “The strong protection of the Russian River mouth and estuary will preserve cormorant colonies, the major Sonoma county bird loafing site, as well as the harbor seals.” (Comment #48)
- 6. Private versus public land.** A number of comments were focused on the pros and cons of siting MPAs adjacent to private or public lands. Some individuals felt it was not appropriate or fair to “close” waters offshore private lands. Others felt public land should remain open. Example comments include:

 - a. “By closing the entire 6 mile stretch of Richardson Ranches (Salt Pt. to Black Pt.) does absolutely nothing to enhance fish populations. If it hasn't done so in the last 125 years, then what could possibly make anyone thing that it could in the future?” (Comment #72)
 - b. “I would like to see public access to share fishing and diving kept open for people that do not own ocean front property... The dynamics behind the selection process is compromise and balance. If they close Sea Ranch with safe public access points, safety should be a concern. If they close private property such as Richardson Ranch, it impacts the public much less.” (Comment #172)

A Citizen Proposal for Point Arena

While not a recurring theme throughout the workshops, concerned citizens from the Gualala/Point Arena brought forth a proposal they developed for their area. One of the small group sessions in

Gualala focused specifically on this proposal and allowed the creators to present their ideas. The proposal identified important local factors and features that should be considered, as well as ideas for how to arrange and designate MPAs to minimize local impacts. MLPA staff received the full proposal during the Gualala workshop and this packet has been distributed to the NCCRSB. Additionally, this citizen proposal is available on the MLPA website and in print copy. Some members of the public provided comments in support of the citizen proposal. Example comments include:

- a. "A proposal by the fisherman and people of Point Arena was submitted on 2/5/08. It is my belief this will be the best proposal to consider as it was prepared by the real people that is going to be affected and have to make a living in this area they are compromising and trying to bargain." (Comment #90)
- b. "I like Allen Jacob's [the citizen] proposal for our area." (Comment #103)