

California MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group
Narrative Rationale for SCRSG Marine Protected Area Proposal 2
September 17, 2009

Designed to meet the intent and spirit of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) and garner a broad range of cross-interest support, the MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (SCRSG) Work Group 2 marine protected area (MPA) proposal includes some of the most biologically productive, rich and diverse marine habitats in the state.

Among many key habitats captured are lush kelp forests, rugged reef systems, submarine canyons, intertidal coastal stretches, surf grass beds, pinniped rookeries, avian roosting sites, estuaries and tidal flats. There are places where boat traffic is incessant, others where it is nearly non-existent. There are near-port areas that will no-doubt accommodate vigilant enforcement from many sources, and others so remote that compliance will depend, in part, on an honorable sense of “doing what’s right.”

The Group 2 proposal also retains many beloved heritage MPAs. Many were perhaps established “without a clearly defined purpose” (MLPA language), but have evolved to provide educational opportunities and the opportunity for the public to observe coastal ecosystems that have larger and more abundant organisms than they would if harvest of them were allowed. Retained Heritage MPAs also enjoy complementary local support and infrastructure, and support for educational and recreational opportunities.

The Group 2 proposal is also rooted in the notion of cross-interest support, efforts toward which were vigorously pursued throughout the step-wise, iterative MLPA process. As a result, it can be supported by public agencies, coastal water, wastewater and power agencies, professional and recreational fishing families, ports and harbors, trade and private NGOs, conservation groups, fish processors and markets, restaurateurs, educational organizations, ocean oriented businesses and recreational enthusiasts.

Group 2 endeavored to meet design guidelines while balancing them with socio-economic impacts, an equilibrium necessary to gaining the local support essential to MPA success. We considered Ecotrust’s spatial analyses of fisheries value, plus modeling analysis from both the University of California at Davis and the University of California at Santa Barbara’s bio-economic models. We also undertook exhaustive outreach to coastal-dependent entities to understand the socio-economic impacts to public essential services and industries that use areas under consideration for MPA’s.

Based on this comprehensive effort, it is our firm conviction that any proposal resulting in higher socio-economic impacts than Group 2’s proposal would result in failed ocean-dependent businesses, disrupted harbor operations and significant impacts to the century-old culture of our coastal communities.

We believe Group 2’s proposal meets the goals of the Act. However, given natural distributions of some “key” habitats and shortcomings of best readily available data (accuracy, completeness), several identified “key” habitat types were unavailable in sufficient amount and within Science Advisory Team-identified benchmark distances. In some of these instances selection of the most proximal “replicates” of these habitats could not be feasibly accommodated without enduring unacceptable socio-economic impacts. In other cases, Group

2 members, whose local knowledge includes over 350 years of at-sea experience, were able to help bridge or correct those data gaps.

In conclusion, the Group 2 proposal includes key geographies and protects essential, iconic habitats necessary to advance goals of the MLPA and provide an efficient and effective MPA network in the South Coast Study Area. Its value is enhanced by the support it has received, from not only those who contributed to its design, but from the individuals, businesses and agencies upon whose cooperation and sacrifice it depends for success. Adoption of the Group 2 proposal will provide excellent conservation value, avoid undue, unnecessary socio-economic harm and ensure protected ocean parks for generations to come.