



Ocean Protection

Marine Life Protection Act & MLPA Initiative Backgrounder

Marine Life Protection Act

The Marine Life Protection Act was enacted in 1999 by the California Legislature. This statute directs the Fish & Game Commission to re-examine and improve the state's patchwork system of marine protected areas, and to adopt a statewide system that, to the degree possible, works as a network. The purpose of the new network is to protect the diversity of marine ecosystems and unique habitats and to help sustain and protect populations of marine species.

The Act dictates that marine protected areas and sound fishery management must be complementary components in sustaining marine habitats and fish species. It seeks to designate marine protected areas in which all human activities that may disturb the marine environment are minimized. However, the Act does not specify the size or location of protected areas, what species need additional protections or how much protection is necessary in order to meet its general goals. Instead, it leaves those questions open-ended, simply stating that those factors are to be determined by the "best readily available science."

Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative constitutes a third attempt to implement the Act, after the first two attempts were postponed due to lack of funding. This iteration of the initiative process began in August 2004 with approximately \$7 million in private funds and \$1.2 million in public funding, resulting in a public-private memorandum of understanding (MOU).

The initiative resulted in the establishment of a new entity not specified in statute: a Blue Ribbon Task Force. The task force is composed of appointed, non-state officials to oversee private contract staff working on the Act's implementation, including the process of public stakeholder input. The MOU also authorizes the task force to recommend policy preferences, assuming the statutory role of the Department of Fish and Game. And the Act called for a Science Advisory Team to advise on the best

readily available science necessary for making the key decisions in designating and managing the protected marine areas.

Through this initiative, California has an historic opportunity to create a network of marine protected areas that will gain the support of all involved. The California Fisheries Coalition supports a sustainable, ecosystem-based approach to marine conservation; one that considers all environmental impacts on our ocean and arrives at a comprehensive plan based on best available science.

Additional information regarding the Marine Life Protection Initiative is available on the Department of Fish and Game's website at: www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa.