

## Are legislative leaders fish-flopping?

Jim Martin

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Assembly Speaker John Pérez, D-Los Angeles, recently made a "once in a lifetime" visit to the North Coast to meet with a small group of environmentally minded Mendocino Democrats.

On the list of topics discussed were the high-handed tactics being used by the state's consultants to rush through a complex, top-down Marine Life Protection Act.

The local Democrats expressed concern that instead of focusing on real and emerging threats of new oil drilling, wave energy and other forms of industrial uses of the ocean and the ever-present threat from degraded water quality, marine protected areas are instead targeting only subsistence, recreational and commercial fishing - critical elements of the local economy and culture.

Pérez sympathized with the local attendees by sharing a concern regarding the city of Maywood (Los Angeles County) in his district, where residents get blue, green or tan water from their taps - rendering it undrinkable. Certainly, those present surmised, he knew that marine protected areas are being pushed in Southern California, where they also just punish fishermen without any real benefits.

Assembly members Noreen Evans and Wes Chesbro, who were also at the meeting, understand the questionable implementation of state law. They shared concerns about the process, incomplete science and inappropriately focused priorities.

The locals felt as if they had been heard.

But, as it turns out, just days before his trip to the North Coast, Pérez had sent a letter to the state Fish and Game Commission advocating for the "strongest possible" marine protection areas, knowing, one presumes, that it simply meant the most expansive restrictions on fishing and fishing-related small businesses and jobs.

Sadly, the Assembly speaker's letter repeats worn out PR spin about restoring fisheries, protecting ocean health and using the best science. But the facts give a different view.

In 2009, researchers Boris Worm and Ray Hilborn led a team examining fisheries worldwide and concluded that fisheries off California are among the best protected in the world and that good management here was, in fact, pushing fishing to areas of the world with poor protection, thus exacerbating the problems there.

Closer to home, the California Department of Fish and Game reports that no state fisheries are in crisis. And the scientific team advising the marine protection area effort concluded that the areas will have negligible and uncertain value to fisheries, but significant and predictable costs.

Pérez says he understands there are serious ocean threats other than fishing and yet he calls for adoption

of the most expansive anti-fishing marine protection areas.

Does Pérez know or care about any of this? Those of us meeting with him this summer thought he did, until we discovered his letter advocating for an excessive marine protection area system.

So what's a voter to do? Maybe we'll add an extra splash of oil and a dash of brown water to Speaker Pérez's plate the next time he comes to Mendocino for local seafood.

Jim Martin is a trustee of the California Fisheries Coalition and the West Coast regional director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance. He has been engaged in the Marine Protection Act adoption process since 2004.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/10/25/EDN71G0SM8.DTL>

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