

MEMORANDUM

TO: California Fish and Game Commission
FROM: California Ocean Science Trust
DATE: July 24, 2014
REGARDING: Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan

The California Ocean Science Trust is pleased to present, for your consideration, the draft Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan. This plan is designed to ensure that marine protected area (MPA) monitoring in the Central Coast will meet the requirements of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). It has been developed in close partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and with extensive input from scientists from throughout California and beyond, resource managers, tribal communities, and members of the Central Coast ocean community.

In this brief introductory memo, we highlight key aspects of the process that has led to a scientifically rigorous plan that appropriately applies the MPA monitoring framework to the Central Coast region in a manner that reflects both local priorities and manager needs. This process has brought the Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan in line with existing plans that were approved by the Commission for North Central and South Coast MPAs, while also building on lessons learned over the past several years from across the state.

Building on new scientific understanding and extensive input from scientists

This Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan is informed by results of the Central and North Central Coast baseline monitoring programs, and it reflects extensive input and feedback from scientists throughout California and beyond. Our process for gaining scientific input has involved multiple steps:

1. Ongoing consultation with a wide range of experts has allowed us to incorporate new scientific understanding into the plan, and build on the results of baseline monitoring in the Central and North Central Coast.
2. A sub-group of the California Ocean Protection Council's Science Advisory Team vetted technical components of an earlier draft of the plan.
3. Numerous scientists from throughout the Central Coast region participated in community gatherings, and gave feedback through the public input process (see below).

In addition to improving and reinforcing the scientific basis of the Central Coast MPA monitoring plan, involvement by scientists has strengthened partnerships and, in some cases, pointed the way toward valuable opportunities for collaboration that we can pursue when implementing this plan in the coming years.

Community gatherings to inform development of a draft plan

Early in the process of developing this plan, members of the Central Coast ocean community were invited to gather in an informal setting to share suggestions of monitoring priorities; explore opportunities for partnerships and collaborations to support continued MPA monitoring; and exchange ideas, concerns, and questions about designing a program to guide monitoring over the coming years.

These community gatherings were hosted in Morro Bay, Pacific Grove, and Santa Cruz the week of January 13, 2014. More than 180 community members, representing a wide variety of ocean users, interests, and perspectives, participated in the conversations. Input from these sessions was summarized in a Key Themes document available on OceanSpaces.org.¹

Public input on a draft of the Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan

A draft of this plan was released for public input from May 14, 2014 through June 4, 2014. Electronic copies of the draft monitoring plan were distributed via a wide array of Central Coast channels, including email announcements to a broad list of over 600 Central Coast and other community members, postings on OceanSpaces.org, listings on online community calendars, e-newsletter postings made possible by organizations and groups throughout the region, and messages to all regional libraries. Hard copies of the draft monitoring plan were made available at a number of regional locations, including local harbor offices and CDFW regional offices.

Public input ranged from specific suggestions for monitoring metrics and focal species, to more general comments and questions regarding planning and implementation of MPA monitoring. Input and planned changes in response to that input are summarized in a Key Themes document available on OceanSpaces.org.² The wide range of insightful and constructive input contributed by the community significantly improved the Central Coast MPA Monitoring Plan.

Realizing the broader value of MPA monitoring

Through MPA monitoring, California is building a unique body of knowledge that can form the foundation for research and assessment of the state's coastal and marine ecosystems. While the long-term Central Coast MPA monitoring program described in this plan must meet the mandated requirements of the MLPA, it has also been developed to provide useful information for other aspects of California's ocean resource management. The partnerships and scientific knowledge gained from this program can be of considerable value across many different issues (e.g. climate change, fisheries management), and across many different government (e.g. local, state, and federal agencies) and non-government institutions. Through partnerships and collaborations across mandates and jurisdictions, more comprehensive monitoring can provide a greater return on investments in the statewide MPA network.

¹ http://oceanspaces.org/sites/default/files/regions/files/cc_communitygatherings_keythemes_final.pdf

² <http://oceanspaces.org/sites/default/files/regions/files/cc-publicinput-keythemes-final.pdf>