

MPA Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative? A public-private partnership designed to help the State of California implement the Marine Life Protection Act, using the best readily available science as well as the advice and assistance of scientists, resource managers, experts, stakeholders and members of the public.

Short Answer: The MLPA Initiative is a tool to implement the Act that went into law in 1999.

Why are we creating MPAs? The Marine Life Protection Act was signed into law in 1999 and directs the state to redesign California's system of marine protected areas to increase its coherence and effectiveness in protecting the state's marine life and habitats, marine ecosystems, and marine natural heritage, as well as to improve recreational, educational and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems.

Short Answer: The MLPA directs the state to create a system of MPAs to improve marine ecosystems, natural marine heritage and improve recreational and educational opportunities.

What are marine protected areas? Marine protected areas (MPAs) are named, discrete geographic marine or estuarine areas designed to protect or conserve marine life and habitat. Examples within California that you may be familiar with include Año Nuevo State Marine Conservation Area, Point Lobos State Marine Reserve, Point Sur State Marine Conservation Area, and Point Buchon State Marine Reserve.

Short Answer: Marine protected areas are areas set aside in the ocean or estuaries to protect or conserve wildlife and their habitats.

What can I do in a marine protected area? There are three types of MPAs: state marine reserve, state marine park, and state marine conservation area, each with different rules about what activities can or cannot be done within each. In general, marine reserves do not allow any type of extractive activities (including fishing or kelp harvesting), with the exception of scientific collecting under a permit, marine parks do not allow any commercial extraction, and marine conservation areas do not allow some combination of commercial and/or recreational extraction.

Short Answer: SMR do not allow any type extractive activities, SMCA do allow some combination of commercial and/or recreational extraction, and SMP do not allow commercial extraction. Unless specifically prohibited all non-consumptive recreational activities like diving, surfing, kayaking are allowed within MPAs.

When and where did the MLPA Initiative start? Redesigning the system of MPAs along California's 1100 miles of coastline is such a large task that it was divided up into smaller pieces. In the first phase of the initiative, a master plan framework was created to help guide the planning process within individual geographic areas, called study regions. After the framework was created, the first effort to redesign a group of MPAs took place along the central coast, from Pigeon Point in San Mateo County to Point Conception in Santa Barbara County. In April 2007 the California Fish and Game Commission adopted a final package of MPAs for the central coast.

Short Answer: The central coast region, from Pigeon Point to Point Conception, was the first successful pilot of the MLPAl and resulted in the adoption of MPAs for the central coast in April 2007.

How are MPAs designed in the MLPA process? Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are designed through a collaborative public process. A Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) is formed of people who are knowledgeable in the uses and/or resources of the study region. Members may include, but not be limited to, commercial and/or recreational fishermen, educators and conservationists. The RSG works together to design MPA proposals for a study region. Once MPA proposals are completed they undergo scientific and policy review, and are ultimately approved or denied by the California Fish and Game Commission, which is the final decision making body in the MLPA process.

Short Answer: MPAs are designed under a public process by a group of regional stakeholders that include fisherman, educators, conservationists, and recreational users. MPA proposals undergo a scientific and policy review before a final decision from the California Fish and Game Commission is made.

How do I know where an MPA is, are they all marked with buoys? Most MPA boundaries are designed to use major onshore landmarks and simple due north/south or east/west lines for easy recognition. However it is ultimately up to the user to determine if they are in an MPA. Regulations and site-specific MPA maps are available on this web site at, www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa/maps.asp. In many cases, interpretive or boundary signage will be in place to identify MPA sites along coastal access points.

Short Answer: MPAs were designed to use simple north/south or east/west lines for easy recognition however, these lines are not marked and one must refer to site-specific maps and MPA coordinates for boundaries. In many cases, interpretive or boundary signage will mark MPA sites along coastal access points.

If an area is closed as an MPA, will it always be closed? Not necessarily. The MLPA allows the Department to re-examine MPAs and the MPA network for effectiveness. This means that as MPAs are re-assessed for effectiveness changes may be necessary, either to individual MPAs or the network as a whole. This may mean changing allowances for extractive activities depending on how well MPAs are meeting their goals and could also mean that other previously closed sites may be proposed for re-opening. Just because an area is closed to one type of use or another does not mean that it will always be that way. The adaptive management approach recommends that the MPAs be re-assessed approximately every 5 years and during that assessment the MPA designation can change.

Short Answer: The MLPA's adaptive management approach recommends that MPAs be re-assessed for effectiveness about every 5 years during which time an MPA designation can change.

How does the MLPA and MPA placement affect existing fisheries management measures and closures? MPAs and the MLPA are intended to compliment existing fishery regulations and are not intended to replace existing regulations. MPAs address a broad array of ecosystem concerns and, in particular, allow for interactions between both fished and unfished species to occur in a more natural setting. If any changes to fisheries regulations were required in response to MPAs, this would occur through existing systems established in fisheries management plans and other regulatory frameworks.

Short Answer: n/a